

Red Sea mediation

PRESIDENT Hosni Mubarak met yesterday with Yemeni Foreign Minister Abdel-Karim Al-Iryani, who announced, after the meeting, that his government has accepted the French proposal to resolve its dispute with Eritrea over the Hanish islands at the southern mouth of the Red Sea, reports Nevine Khalil.

Al-Iryani told reporters that he had briefed Mubarak on the latest developments concerning the French mediation. He said France has come up with an acceptable solution from the Yemeni viewpoint. "Yemen is very satisfied with the French proposal," Al-Iryani said. "We hope the Eritrean response will be similar." He added that a French envoy was in Asmara yesterday to get approval from the Eritrean government.

Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Moussa described the meeting as "very important," saying that Yemen was briefed fully on the meeting which took place last Sunday in Cairo between Mubarak and Eritrean President Isayas Afewerki.

Reports that a summit between Yemeni and Eritrean presidents will be held in Cairo Saturday to resolve the dispute face-to-face were firmly denied by both the Egyptian and Yemeni foreign ministers.

Oil for food

IRAQ told diplomats yesterday that a "memorandum of understanding" on an oil-for-food plan could be signed with the UN by the end of next week, signaling major progress in the current talks.

But sources close to the negotiations urged caution, saying that Iraqi negotiators were painting a rosier picture than justified in the week-old talks.

Iraq and the United Nations have been discussing a 1995 Security Council offer that would allow Baghdad to sell \$2 billion worth of oil over six months, on a renewable basis, to buy civilian goods for its economy, which has been hard hit by sanctions since the August 1990 invasion of Kuwait.

Baghdad's chief negotiator to talk with the UN, Abdal-Amin Al-Anbari, told ambassadors of eight non-aligned members of the Security Council on Tuesday that his country was willing to implement the UN offer without change.

Khartoum call

SUDANESE authorities yesterday renewed an appeal to the public to help in the search for three Egyptians suspected of involvement in an assassination attempt against President Hosni Mubarak in Addis Ababa last June. The government, in its second such appeal in less than a week, also warned that anyone harbouring the suspects risked up to five years' imprisonment.

The Sudanese move came after the UN Security Council approved in January a resolution seeking Sudan to hand over the three suspects to Ethiopia within 60 days. The Council will meet again to discuss further action if Khartoum fails to meet this demand.

Representatives of the Sudanese opposition in exile said Khartoum's action was designed only to create an impression that it was cooperating with the UN, while, in reality, it has turned Sudan into a terrorists' haven.

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Ready to shop till they drop, bargain-hunters gear up for the *Eid* by queuing outside a store about to open. Crowds like this have rendered walking and driving around Cairo a Darwinian free-for-all where only the strongest, and quickest, will prevail

photo: Sherif Sonbol

The peace process takes a breather as Peres decides to bring Israeli elections forward by some five months. Future progress now hinges on the Israeli poll's results

Shadows over the poll

Which is to loom larger in the poll, Rabin's ghost or the Golan's shadow? Graham Usher, in Jerusalem, writes

After weeks of speculation, on 11 February Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres, hit on the electoral bullet and announced he was dissolving parliament to bring forward the Israeli elections to the "earliest possible date." The next day he met with Likud opposition leader, Binyamin Netanyahu. It was agreed that the election would be on "either 28 May or 4 June," depending on the views of the Israel's religious parties (28 May falls immediately after the Jewish holiday of Shavuot).

Peres and his Labour coalition government are currently riding 12-20 points clear of Likud, say Israeli opinion polls. But it is a popularity artificially buoyed by the "sympathy legacy," generated since the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin last November. This legacy could easily evaporate in the heat of an electoral battle where issues are likely to take precedence over personalities.

For the immediate future at least, Peres is hoping the mood holds. At the press conference where he announced the dissolution, the Israeli prime minister spent much of the time recalling the night of Rabin's killing and vowed to "continue in the path forged by Rabin and myself."

The ghost of Rabin is bound to play a role in the elections, and Likud are none too happy about it. Labour should "understand that if it uses the Rabin assassination in its campaign, we won't sit and do nothing while being hit below the belt," says Likud's campaign manager, Limor Livnat.

Peres' actual motives for moving up the election date are not clear. On assuming the premiership in November, the signs were that he wanted to see out the full term of his government which expires November 1996. Now, it appears, and in a manner typical of him, Peres has changed his mind. "The negotiations with Syria on security arrangements and water issues are taking longer than expected... and peace can be pursued while an election campaign is under way," he said on 11 February.

Likud would privately prefer to see as much water pass as possible between the assassination and the election, since it is still reeling from charges (made by Rabin's widow, Leah, among others) that in using words like "murdered" and "treason" to describe the Oslo peace process it helped create the climate for the late prime minister's killing. But

this is not to say that Likud is unprepared for the poll.

In recent months, Likud has undertaken a membership drive where, it claims, it has recruited 200,000 new supporters. And, on 8 February, Netanyahu signed an electoral pact with Israel's second largest opposition bloc, the far-right Tzomet Party lead by former army chief of staff, Rafael Eitan.

The Likud leader spelled out his party's programme for the elections immediately after Peres' statement on 11 February. "We will make sure Jerusalem remains undivided, that the Golan prospers under Israel's control, and that a Palestinian state is established, but limited to self rule areas," he said.

This, superficially, is not all that different to Labour's official platform. "Like a solid rock, we will stand firm on a united Jerusalem as the capital of Israel," said Peres on 12 February. Likud, too, is resigned to the irreversible fact of a Palestinian authority in the West Bank and Gaza. "We will work within the new reality," says Netanyahu.

"We cannot change what exists and go back into West Bank towns." And Labour, form-

ly, is against the establishment of a Palestinian state.

This means the main divide is over the peace process with Syria. Likud and Tzomet are crystal clear that under no circumstances would they relinquish Israeli sovereignty on the occupied Golan Heights. Peres has said that any Israeli withdrawal from the Golan would be subject to a referendum to be held after the elections.

But Peres' ultimate prize is a fully-fledged peace with all of Israel's front-line Arab states, including Syria and Lebanon. And most Israeli analysts quietly concede that the price of a "full peace" with these countries is to be Israel's "full withdrawal" from the Golan Heights and South Lebanon.

Unlike Israel's redeployment in the West Bank and Gaza, however, "giving up" the Golan is not popular on the Israeli street and will cost Peres votes. And the closer the electoral contest becomes between Labour and Likud, the more important will be the strength of their alliances with the myriad small parties, including the Jewish orthodox and the Arab parties, that also inhabit Israeli politics.

Dovish gestures vie with red lines on Labour's platform

The secretary-general of Israel's ruling Labour Party, Nissim Zvili, suggested yesterday that the party should back the dismantling of Jewish settlements in the Jordan Valley region of the West Bank.

With general elections scheduled for May or June, Zvili told the *Haaretz* newspaper that a Labour congress on 25 April would consider altering its platform. He also confirmed that his party would consider removing a clause in its platform rejecting an independent Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. But he acknowledged that a majority of Labour members might not agree.

Prime Minister Shimon Peres, however, flatly rejected Zvili's suggestion regarding the Jordan Valley settlements. "We have no plans whatsoever to dismantle a single settlement in the Jordan Valley, which will remain our security border," Peres said.

According to AFP news agency, some 3,500 Israelis now live in about 20 settlements along the Jordan Valley.

Interior Minister Haim Ramon agreed with Zvili that several clauses in Labour's platform, including the one opposing Palestinian statehood, "did not stand the test of reality." His preferred solution is a Jordanian-Palestinian federation. According to Zvili, Prime Minister Shimon Peres would also prefer a Jordanian-Palestinian confederation.

Israeli radio yesterday, Zvili set out four "red lines" that he said must not be crossed in the final status talks with the Palestinians: the Jordan Valley must remain Israel's *de facto* eastern security border; Israel must refuse a return to its pre-1967 borders; Jerusalem must remain the unified capital of Israel; Palestinian refugees must not be allowed to return to homes inside Israeli territory.

For the Palestinians, early Israeli elections imply delayed changes in their National Covenant

The chairman of the Palestine National Council (PNC) said yesterday that a vote on amending the PLO's charter might be delayed because of early elections in Israel.

The PLO-Israel autonomy agreement stipulates that the PNC, the Palestinians' parliament-in-exile, must annul charter clauses, which Israel believes imply a call for its destruction, by the spring. "Early elections in Israel may change the time of the PNC meeting," said Salim Zamoun, acting chairman of the PNC. Israel will be busy at that time and

it may be a reason for a change or delay."

General elections in Israel will be held in late May or early June, five months ahead of the original 29 October date. Israel has warned it will freeze negotiations on the final status of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, which are due to start by early May, unless Yasser Arafat keeps his promise to amend the charter.

The PLO-Israel autonomy agreement states the charter must be modified within two months of the first meeting of the newly elected Palestinian Legislative Council that

administers the West Bank and Gaza Strip. A first meeting of the council is tentatively scheduled for late next week, after the three-day *Eid Al-Fitr* holiday at the end of the holy month of Ramadan.

In a related development, following a meeting with Arafat in Gaza on Tuesday, US Senator Daniel Inouye told Israeli officials that Arafat did not seem serious about changing the PLO's charter, said Israeli Foreign Ministry spokesman Danny Shekhi.

Palestinian legislators have urged Arafat to

win concessions from Israel in return for modifying the charter. A key demand is that Israel recognise the Palestinians' right to statehood.

Meanwhile, the PLO has already begun preparations for a PNC meeting, submitting to Israel the names of 193 members living abroad who wish to return for the meeting. Zaanoun said Israel's processing of the applications had taken longer than expected, and that it had demanded new information on PNC members wishing to return.

Unconcerned, Syria still prefers Labour, reports Atef Saqr from Damascus

The decision of Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres to hold early elections is viewed in Damascus as an internal affair, probably made to ensure Labour's return to power. What matters for the Syrians, however, is the achievement of a just and comprehensive peace.

Opinions were divided about the impact of early elections on the Syrian-Israeli negotiations, scheduled to resume on 26 February at the Wye estate near Washington. Some said that discussion of the central issues would be delayed until after the election. It was

also suggested that a Labour victory could give the negotiations a major boost.

Bringing the elections forward does not concern Syria at all," insisted Abdal-Nabi Hegazi, director of the state-owned radio and television. "What counts for Syria is the realisation of a comprehensive and just peace, based on international legality... What concerns Syria is the content of a peace settlement."

Given a choice, Hegazi said he would prefer Labour, despite the fact that it has yet to accept Syria's demands. "But

this does not mean that we are placing our bets on this or that party."

Ali Ersan, the Syrian chairman of the Arab Writers Union, believes the elections have been timed to maximise Labour victory prospects, by being held before negotiations have reached the point of grappling with the issue of withdrawal to the 1967 borders. Peres wants to be voted in before taking a decision that is "bound to be controversial."

On an international scale, Ersan contended that a Labour victory and a breakthrough in the negotiations could be a trump card for Clinton in the November presidential election.

A post-election acceleration in the pace of negotiations was also forecast by Sadeq El-Azmi, a philosophy professor at Damascus University. "All indications are that Peres will emerge the winner," El-Azmi said. "He will consider that he has been given a mandate from the Israeli people to achieve peace with Syria on conditions that are acceptable to the two sides."

Banking on peace

The Middle East Bank is not just about money, but equally about peace, writes Samia Nkrumah

As expected, all the projects emerging from the Middle East/North Africa (MENA) economic summit are concerned not only with economic development, but with politics as well. The regional development bank proposed at the first MENA summit in Casablanca and announced at the second MENA summit in Amman is no exception.

It took less than two years for the concept of a bank to develop into actual preparations. On Tuesday, the task force on financing mechanisms for the region's economic development met in Cairo for its ninth session. And yesterday it achieved two main objectives.

First, it defined the working arrangements, or mandate, for a transition team which will begin its work on 1 April. Second, it edged a step closer to reaching the final stage of negotiations, after which a charter for the bank will be ratified by the 19 prospective shareholders, who are also members of the bank. The signing of the charter will take place in New York and the United Nations will be the depository of the agreement. Ratification could take anything from weeks to months and the bank is not expected to begin operating before mid-1997.

The delay did not come as a surprise. Ambassador Raouf Saad, assistant foreign minister for regional cooperation and head of the Egyptian team of negotiators, commented, "It is not an easy task to establish a regional bank in the present circumstances. We are not talking about a purely technical institution. The bank emerged within certain conditions governed by the peace pro-

cess. Each step must be carefully considered. The task force not only includes the founding members, but also countries which have not yet endorsed the bank. It is, however, made up of countries which have supported the idea of creating a financing mechanism to support public sector initiatives, whatever form it may take."

Discussions during the two-day talks underscored this point. One concern was to ensure that channels of communication will be kept open between the task force and the transitional team of experts which will reside in Cairo to oversee the preparations for a plan of action for the bank's first three years of operation. These include the bank's budget and looking into pilot projects.

The transition team will be made up of not more than eight experts. Egypt put forward a highly qualified candidate. Other members of the bank like the US, Japan, Italy, Greece, and the Netherlands as well as Israel also offered candidates," said told *Al-Ahram Weekly*, yesterday.

Existing members of the bank have their own structure which will be represented by a special committee. The transitional team will report to this committee and the original task force will remain active and supervise the workings of the transitional team. This is necessary because, unlike the transitional team, the task force is directed by politicians and includes members from countries which have not yet endorsed the bank. It is, however, made up of countries which have supported the idea of creating a financing mechanism to support public sector initiatives, whatever its shape may be.

Another issue that will not be decided upon at this stage is the presidency of the bank and its board of directors. The United States, a main endorser of the bank, attended the Cairo talks as an observer and put forward a coordinator until the presidency is decided upon.

Other factors may intervene to stall the bank's operation. "The outcome of the American elections next November will decide whether the bank will see the light," commented Mohamed Shetayeh, head of the Palestinian delegation at the talks.

Nevertheless, Shetayeh warned that "the establishment of this bank was proposed to serve the peace process, and without economic development, peace will not stand on solid ground."

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Across the Nile rift

A group of prominent Egyptian and Sudanese figures set up the Nile Valley Association last week. The group's aim is to affirm that the rift in official Egyptian-Sudanese relations could not affect the historic ties between the peoples of the two countries. The establishment of this "unity" group came on the heels of a UN Security Council resolution that gave the Khartoum government 60 days to hand over three Egyptians suspected of taking part in an abortive attempt on the life of President Hosni Mubarak in Addis Ababa last June.

Egyptians reacted with mixed feelings to the resolution, as well as to the possibility that sanctions might be imposed on Sudan if it failed to extradite the three suspects. Islamists viewed America's hostility to any government that "hoists the Islamic banner". Others felt that Sudan should be penalised for its support of terrorism, but expressed concern that the Sudanese people might be forced to pay for the mistakes of their government.

Milad Hanna, a leftist intellectual and one of the association's founders, said the group included those who shared the vision of the Egyptian and Sudanese peoples maintaining their "strategic ties". They are also united on the demand for democracy, liberalism and the creation of a civil society that seeks development within the framework of diversity.

Hanna, a long-time advocate of Egyptian-Sudanese unity, said many Sudanese intellectuals shared his view that bilateral cooperation was the only way the two countries could achieve a higher degree of development. "Sudan is a very diverse country and the differences are not only between the north and south," Hanna said. "Within this framework, the only way Sudan can develop is by scrapping the religious state and adopting a system based on pluralism. With such diversity, there is also a need for an ambitious development project and this cannot be achieved except through cooperation with Egypt."

But for Egypt's Islamists, mainly the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood and the Islamist-oriented Labour Party, the action against Sudan in the Security Council was another indication of America's "aggressive attitude towards any regime that hoists the banner of Islam", as Maamoun El-Hodeibi, the Brotherhood's spokesman, put it.

Hodeibi said he did not want to get involved in the exchange of accusations between Cairo and Khartoum because he did not have enough information. "All that we know is based on what is in the newspapers and that is not enough," he said. "Each of the two countries says it has proof and we

cannot tell exactly where the truth lies."

Hodeibi added, however, that he regretted the deterioration in relations between the two countries. "Egypt accuses Sudan of hosting violent groups that want to overthrow the government and Khartoum is angry because all the Sudanese opposition groups are based in Cairo and they, too, want to overthrow their government," he said.

Adel Hussein, secretary-general of the Labour Party, said he opposed the imposition of sanctions on any Arab or Islamic country as a matter of principle. "It is very clear that the United States is using the Security Council to impose its will on the international community," Hussein said. "We also believe the Security Council applies double standards when dealing with the Arab countries and Israel. The latter violates international law on a daily basis and we never hear of it being threatened by sanctions."

Hussein said the possibility of sanctions against Sudan meant that another of Egypt's neighbours would also be in trouble. Libya has been under an air transport and arms embargo since April 1992.

Sanctions were imposed for its refusal to hand over to the United States or Britain two Libyans accused of involvement in the bombing of a Pan Am flight over Lockerbie, Scotland, in 1988 killing 270 people.

"Egypt and Sudan should sit together and try to reach an agreement," Hussein said. "If this fails, Arab or African countries should intervene to settle the dispute. But Egypt should not have resorted in the Security Council or outside parties, under any circumstances, to solve our differences. This does even greater harm to our national interest."

But Saadeddin Ibrahim, sociology professor at the American University in Cairo and director of the Ibn Khaldoun Centre for Development Studies, criticised defenders of the Sudanese regime, who, he said, were willing to leap to the defence of any Arab government, even if it was undemocratic.

"Egyptians are sympathetic to the Arab peoples suffering the consequences of sanctions in Libya

and Iraq," Ibrahim said. "But this sympathy is not extended to the tyrannical governments ruling the two countries. I do not think it is in the interest of Arab countries to cover up the unacceptable behaviour of a fellow Arab government simply because it is Arab or Muslim. Iraq, Libya and Sudan got us [Arabs] involved in many problems and we are still paying the price of their mistakes. We should definitely rid ourselves of this sort of backward tribal solidarity."

Ibrahim said the military regime in Khartoum continued to violate the human rights of the Sudanese people on a daily basis, "turning the country into a series of prisons and ghost houses". [Sudanese President Omar] Al-Bashir dissolved the parliament and political parties, escalated the war in the south and caused his country's relations with all its neighbours to deteriorate. Why should we support such a regime?"

However, there is also a large body of opposition to sanctions from those critical of the regime. Mohamed Fayek, secretary-general of the Arab Organisation for Human Rights, described the Security Council resolution on Sudan as "logical and responsible". But he commented that the imposition of sanctions on poor countries harmed the people of those countries more than the governments.

"Consequently, imposing sanctions is unjustifiable and should be viewed as a violation of human rights because the people did not choose their governments, as is the case in most Third World countries," Fayek said. "We should hold the people responsible for the mistakes of their governments."

Fayek blamed the Khartoum government for its policy of "exporting the Islamic revolution". This policy, he said, had led to "the deterioration in Sudan's international relations on all Arab, African and world levels".

Mohamed Al-Ghami, in charge of the Sudanese Department of the Arab Organisation for Human Rights, believes that the poor economic conditions in Sudan would not enable it to survive sanctions for the number of years Iraq and Libya have done.

"Sudan would not be able to endure sanctions, as it neither has the dollars which both Iraq and Libya had before the sanctions, nor does it enjoy good relations with its neighbouring countries," he warned.

And Abdel-Sami Zemaidin, former head of the Egyptian-Sudanese Relations Department at the Egyptian Foreign Ministry, said that the powerful repressive machine of the state would make a Sudanese revolt against the government unlikely. "Khartoum becomes like a big prison, and it is difficult for people to move around after 11pm," he said.

Khartoum re-warned

Foreign Minister Anur Moussa warned that Sudan would be harming its own interests if it persisted in its policy of supporting terrorism



Foreign Minister Anur Moussa urged Sudan on Tuesday to renounce its policy of supporting terrorism and to extradite to Ethiopia three men suspected of taking part in last June's attempt on President Hosni Mubarak's life in Addis Ababa.

In an address to a joint meeting of parliament's Arab affairs, foreign relations and national security committees, Moussa warned the military regime in Khartoum against persisting with its policy of "supporting terrorism, using violence and terrorising neighbouring countries".

"Sudan should clear itself before the world and hand over the three suspects who were named by Ethiopia," Moussa said. "Sudan will be harming its own interests if it persists with its policies and refuses to cooperate with regional and international organisations."

In an indirect allusion to a UN Security Council resolution that gave Sudan 60 days to extradite the three suspects, Moussa said Sudan's cooperation with international organisations was necessary "in order to spare the Sudanese people the hardship of harming their own interests". There has been widespread speculation that sanctions might be imposed on Sudan if it refused to comply.

Moussa described Sudanese nationals residing in Egypt as "brothers living in their own country". They cannot be called to account for the foolish and unscrupulous policy of the Sudanese government, which is only interim, provisional and cannot last."

The disputed Halaib border region, Moussa said, should serve as "a meeting point between the two peoples and not a point of contention. We believe that Sudan's northern border extends all the way to Alexandria and that Egypt's southern border extends all the way to Juba".

In the wide-ranging address, Moussa also spoke about Middle East peace efforts, inter-Arab divisions and the situation in the Horn of Africa.

He said that declarations by Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres that Jerusalem is Israel's ester-

nal capital were "electioneering", and Egypt attached little importance to them. The future of the city will be determined only in the negotiations over the final status of the West Bank, he said.

On the question of the negotiations between Syria and Israel, Moussa said there was "progress in the general climate and also on specific points of a framework of cooperation... but the matter will take time". He said Peres' decision to call for early elections in May would not result in a suspension of the negotiations.

On the Palestinian track, Moussa said "there has been progress in implementing the Oslo Agreement, but there are some difficulties which we are trying to solve". He noted that the final-status negotiations, which are scheduled to open in May and to focus on refugees, Jerusalem, settlements, borders and water, may coincide with the early Israeli elections.

Moussa called for an end in inter-Arab divisions and described Egypt as a corner-stone of regional stability, "not only because of its large population but also because of its cultural and economic weight and scientific progress. The success of economic reform in Egypt is the principal, and possibly the only, factor for realising stability in this country and the region".

Moussa also underlined the significance of stability in the Red Sea and the Horn of Africa, declaring its importance to Egyptian national security. Egypt, he added, has been making efforts to resolve the Eritrean-Yemeni dispute over the Hanish Islands peacefully. "We don't want an Arab-African polarisation and we don't want the situation to deteriorate into a clash", he said.

Moussa said Egypt has despaired of the situation in Somalia which has "reached below-zero point. Somalia is not only threatened with marginalisation, but with its very disappearance, which could destabilise conditions in the Horn of Africa."

Relations with Libya were described as "good", despite the fact that "there are some differences in viewpoints which do not affect the essence of our relationship."

Rot on the Red Sea

Four ex-officials of the Red Sea Governorate are facing disciplinary action on corruption charges and the misappropriation of real estate

Prosecutor-General Raga'a El-Arabi has decided that four ex-officials of the Red Sea Governorate and a police officer will face disciplinary proceedings on charges of influence-peddling and allocating vast areas of land earmarked for tourist investment to themselves or to others in return for bribes. Following an investigation that continued for two and a half years, the attorney-general decided to shelve the cases against 26 other officials and ex-officials, including former Red Sea governor, Yossi El-Shimi.

Those who will face a disciplinary tribunal were named as: Mohamed Abbas El-Sherbini, ex-director of the governor's office; his son, Mohamed Shamseddin El-Sherbini, a police officer; Fathi Mohamed Abu Zeid, ex-chairman of the Ras Ghareb city council; Sayed Ibrahim Shaarwi, ex-chairman of the Safaga city council; and El-Latif Mohamed Ismail, ex-chairman of the Red Sea Governorate's People's Council.

The attorney-general's investigation showed that Mohamed Abbas El-Sherbini appropriated for himself and members of his family vast areas of land, totalling 23,000 square metres, in the areas of Hurghada, Ras Ghareb, Safaga and Zaafarana. He also abused his influential position to allocate other areas of land to certain individuals in return for hefty bribes or other favours. Parts of these lands were later re-sold at inflated prices.

The others are accused of similar malpractices or of assisting El-Sherbini in his illegal activities. Despite the testimony of witnesses and incriminating documents, all suspects denied the accusations.

The attorney-general asked the Interior Ministry to impose the same disciplinary proceedings on the police officer as has been imposed on the ex-governorate officials.

His report asserted that there was no proof that ex-Governor El-Shimi was guilty of any wrong-doing while he held the governor's post between August 1991 and November 1993.

Edging closer, but how much?

Officials on both sides insist that Egyptian-Israeli relations are 'warm'. Nevin Khalil checks their current temperature



Ambassador David Sutin

After a hard-earned peace which has survived for 17 years, neither Egyptian nor Israeli officials want to rock the boat of bilateral relations just as the peace process is edging forward and the prospect of stability in the Middle East is coming closer. However observers maintain that relations between the two peoples continue to be "cool", and predict a dynamic relationship only after a comprehensive peace is reached.

Last week it was reported in the opposition press that the Israeli Foreign Ministry was having difficulties finding a new ambassador for Cairo, following the incumbent ambassador's request to be posted to Canada. The report, which was reproduced from Israel's *Yediot Achronot* newspaper and strongly denied by the Israeli Embassy in Cairo, said that members of the Israeli diplomatic mission are weary of the incredibly tight security measures that are taken to ensure their safety in Egypt, and complained of lukewarm relations with Egyptian diplomats, intellectuals and journalists.

"I cannot describe our relationship as cold," a senior source at the Egyptian Foreign Ministry told the *Weekly*. *"On the contrary it is warm and normal, but we can't discard or dismiss the past."* He said

Yacoub Seti, press counsellor at the Israeli Embassy, in an interview with *Al-Ahram Weekly*, insisted that the press was misleading the readers. Seti vehemently denied that Israeli diplomats were isolated, saying that serving in Cairo was "a very important task and challenge".

David Sultan, the fifth Israeli ambassador, who was posted to Cairo in November 1992, came under fire last year from the opposition press for allegedly taking part in the killing of Egyptian POWs during the 1956 and 1967 wars — allegations which he categorically denies. Sultan, who is of Egyptian descent and is the second-longest serving Israeli ambassador in Cairo, is expected to leave his post in a few months. His reassessment, Egyptian and Israeli diplomatic sources maintained, is a natural move after a three-year posting.

"I refuse to accept the word isolation."

Seti insisted, saying that despite past conflicts between the two nations "it's only a matter of time" before the Egyptians edge closer to the Israelis. He said that he has held almost daily meetings with Egyptians during his three years as press counsellor.

"On the ground I see a very solid connection," he commented.

While insisting that the peace binding Egypt and Israel was not a "cold peace", an Egyptian diplomat could only cite "legal agreements, most important of which is the peace agreement of 1979" as the basis of the two countries' bilateral relations.

And observers believe that away from the official line, Egyptian-Israeli relations are cool, despite numerous bilateral agreements and exchanges.

Political writer and analyst Makram Mo-

hammed Ahmed believes that the true problem lies in the "clash" between the Israeli government and independent Egyptian public opinion-makers. "Israel cannot digest that in Egypt there are independent thinkers whose beliefs and actions run contrary to mainstream politics," said Ahmed, who is also chief editor of *Al-Mussawar* weekly magazine.

Ahmed said that most Egyptian intellectuals had carved out a position of opposing Israel until a comprehensive peace is reached, and until Israel understand that they should not attempt to impose their hegemony over the region. "The clash between the two sides will continue until Israel abandons its schemes for domination," Ahmed predicted.

However, prominent *Al-Ahram* columnist Amis Mansour disagrees with the general anti-Israeli attitude among Egyptians. "We are too sentimental," Mansour said. "We have to put the past behind us and look ahead to where our interests lie."

Commenting on the reported delay in naming Israel's next ambassador to Cairo, Seti said that choosing a highly qualified ambassador for this post was a time-consuming process.

"I must emphasise that the post of ambassador to Cairo is a very important one," Seti agreed. Choosing an ambassador to Cairo was a task undertaken "very carefully", because of Egypt's important role in the region and in the peace process, and the nature of its bilateral relations with Israel.

Ahmed conceded that not all Israeli officials shared the same outlook as their government, and that there were thinkers and writers there whose ideas are moderate and acceptable. "We do not boycott all Israelis, because there are some who oppose the mainstream attitude," he asserted. Lots of Israeli tourists have come to Egypt, he said, and are not discriminated against by the average Egyptian. In his view: "There are no problems between the two peoples."

"[Egyptians] don't hate Israel," agreed Seti. *"I'm sure their hearts are open to the Israelis."*

Mansour said that choosing a highly qualified ambassador for this post was a time-consuming process.

"I must emphasise that the post of ambassador to Cairo is a very important one," Seti agreed. Choosing an ambassador to Cairo was a task undertaken "very carefully", because of Egypt's important role in the region and in the peace process, and the nature of its bilateral relations with Israel.

Ahmed conceded that not all Israeli officials shared the same outlook as their government, and that there were thinkers and writers there whose ideas are moderate and acceptable. "We do not boycott all Israelis, because there are some who oppose the mainstream attitude," he asserted. Lots of Israeli tourists have come to Egypt, he said, and are not discriminated against by the average Egyptian. In his view: "There are no problems between the two peoples."

On the other side of the political fence, Magdi Husseini, the chief editor of the Islamist-oriented *Al-Shabab*, who is himself a victim of Law 93, said that "there is no way the Islamists can be held responsible for restricting the freedom of expression... It is unfair to say that going to court to establish some basic Islamic principles is a violation of the freedom of expression. Why should a magazine be allowed to ridicule prophets and religious people not be allowed to file a lawsuit against the editor?"

Gaber, on the other hand, noted that the government had responded to the concerns of journalists and intellectuals by setting up a committee to draft a new press law to replace Law 93. She also underlined the government's efforts to regulate the right of *haksa* in personal status affairs — a legal licence for any Muslim to file a lawsuit requesting a civil court to divorce couples under the pretext that the husband had renounced Islam. According to a recently approved law, only the prosecutor-general can now initiate a *haksa* lawsuit, after receiving and investigating a complaint from a plaintiff, and deciding that there is a case to answer. This law, Gabr said, "is the first achievement of a legislative committee committed by the minister of justice to review many laws to ensure that no restrictions, under any pretext, are placed on freedom of expression and to guarantee civil liberties."

The EOHR's 80-page report, entitled *The Trap*, covered a wide range of what it deemed legally sanctioned violations of the freedom of expression. These, according to the report, include Law 93 for 1995, with its harsh penalties for publication offences, and the continued enforcement of the Emergency Law along with other laws such as those dealing with censorship, the report said.

The report states that "the government... has further decreased the margin of democracy and political plurality by its adoption of legislative policies curtailing and weakening constitutional and legal guarantees to human rights and fundamental freedoms." The report

Death of a drug dealer

A black banner fluttered early on Monday over Cairo's Bab Al-Khalq's appeals prison, indicating that an execution was about to take place inside. A faded sign declaring that "prison is for rehabilitation and reform" greeted a group of reporters, invited by the Interior Ministry, to speak to the condemned man before he was sent to the gallows.

Reporters were not allowed to witness the execution. Security was tight, with large numbers of guards at the small prison, presumably because all its inmates are on death row.

Although Sedek had previously been sentenced to seven years imprisonment for hashish-trafficking, he insisted that he had

never dealt in drugs. "A womaniser, yes; an alcoholic, yes; but a drug user or dealer, no," he said. "In a matter of minutes, I will be in the hands of God, so why should I lie?"

By profession, Sedek was an engineer, owner of a car agency and a public contractor and, according to his words, had toured the world, was well-off and had no reason to take up drug-trafficking. In a tone of irony mixed with some bitterness, Sedek said that he had filed an appeal with the Court of Cassation but was turned down.

According to the drug-combat department, Sedek had brought large amounts of heroin into the country, mainly from Pakistan, channelled through a smuggling network in some of the Gulf countries.

Sedek claimed he was framed by the police, who used a female informer to set him up.

Asked what he thought of the death pen-

alty, Sedek said it had not proved to be a deterrent "because some dealers are caught while others are not. The big drug barons are confident that they will never be caught."

A reporter asked how he managed to hold himself up. "Why should I collapse?" Sedek



STRONG TIES: President Hosni Mubarak paid a 24-hour visit to Saudi Arabia on Saturday to perform the *umra*, or minor pilgrimage, reports Nevine Khalil. He also held talks with Saudi Crown Prince Abdallah bin Abdel-Aziz, who is running the kingdom's affairs while King Fahd recovers from an illness. Mubarak met with several

members of Saudi Arabia's ruling family, including Defence Minister Prince Sultan bin Abdel-Aziz, Prince of Mecca Maged bin Abdel-Aziz and Foreign Minister Saud Al-Faisal.

The talks between Mubarak and Abdallah, who is also Saudi Arabia's deputy prime minister and chief of the National Guard, in Al-Safa Palace in Mecca,

covered the Middle East peace process, regional security and bilateral relations.

Information Minister Saif El-Sherif described the talks as "positive" and said they "affirmed the strength of bilateral relations". The leaders of the two countries, he said, were intent on holding future consultations on all issues of interest to the Arab



President Mubarak kissing the 'Black Rock' embedded in the Kaaba (left) during his *umra* to Mecca; with Crown Prince Abdallah (above); and Eritrea's Afewerki in Cairo



and Islamic peoples and on ways of promoting joint Arab action.

Mubarak left Saudi Arabia a few hours before the arrival of Jordan's King Hussein, who will be meeting with Egypt's president today in Cairo.

On his return to Cairo on Sunday, Mubarak met Eritrean President Isayas Afewerki to discuss Eri-

ta's dispute with Yemen over the Hanish Islands in the Red Sea. The talks, which lasted for just over an hour, were combined with an *iftar* banquet at the presidential palace in Heliopolis. The two presidents discussed Egypt's mediation efforts in the dispute, which lie near shipping lanes in the Bab Al-Mandab Straits.

Opposition split on parliament

The refusal of the Tagammu and Wafd parties to back a lawsuit filed by three other opposition parties contesting the results of the recent parliamentary elections raises question marks about a major split in opposition ranks. Amira Howeidy investigates

As the administrative courts and the Court of Cassation were processing dozens of complaints about the conduct and results of the recent parliamentary elections in many individual constituencies, three opposition parties decided to take joint action and file a lawsuit to contest the results of the balloting nationwide.

The lawsuit, demanding that the election results be declared null and void, was filed with an administrative court at the end of January, by Ibrahim Shukri, leader of the Islamic-oriented Labour Party, Mustafa Kamel Muataz, leader of the Liberal Party and Daud Dawood, leader of the Democratic Nasserist Party. They were backed by Fikri El-Gazzar, an independent and veteran parliamentarian who failed to win a seat in the 29 November/6 December elections.

Winning a court order to quash the election results would mean that, "the government would not be able to say that the People's Assembly is the master of its own decisions," said Essam El-Ismaili, one of the lawyers who initiated the action.

Surprisingly, the Wafd Party, which won six seats in the new People's Assembly, and the leftist Tagammu, which won five, refused to subscribe to the lawsuit, raising question marks about a major split in the opposition.

"One can understand why the Tagammu and Wafd opposed the idea," said Mustafa Kamel El-Sayed, a political science professor at Cairo University. "The two parties have deputies in the People's Assembly and better access to the public," he said.

Differences within opposition ranks are nothing new, according to El-Sayed. "Although all the opposition parties condemned the irregularities that took place in the elections, they differed on how

to respond to the situation," he said. "Their differences are not new and were clearly visible in the past. The opposition has not always been united."

Yassin Serageldin, leader of the Wafd's parliamentary group, made it clear that his party wanted to disassociate itself from the lawsuit. "Those who filed it are those who failed in the elections. Is this our fault?" he asked.

The Wafd had refused to back the lawsuit because "it is a useless exercise. Even if they won the case and parliament was dissolved, can they guarantee a larger opposition representation in a new People's Assembly? I doubt it."

Asked whether the Wafd decided to take this hands-off stand because it had won six seats in the House, Serageldin responded: "When the Constitutional Court rules that the elections were rigged or unconstitutional, then we will take a stand. But we will not jump to conclusions or shout fiery slogans. We are not Don Quixotes."

The lack of cooperation from Tagammu and the Wafd was bitterly received by Mustafa Bakri of the Liberal Party. "We were hoping to maintain a front since the Wafd and Tagammu leaders had condemned the irregularities in the elections," he said. He was particularly dismayed by the Wafd: "Its refusal took us by surprise. We find it unjustifiable, particularly as its mouthpiece was very critical of what happened during the elections."

Bakri found Tagammu's refusal more understandable. "Tagammu has one priority, which is fighting terrorism and violence. On this particular issue, it stands on common ground with the ruling National Democratic Party," he said.

Asked whether the Wafd's position was understandable, "Tagammu has one priority, which is fighting terrorism and violence. On this particular issue, it stands on common ground with the ruling National Democratic Party," he said.

El-Sayed did not agree with Bakri's claim. In his view, Tagammu's position remains as it was in 1990, when it was the only opposition party to contest the parliamentary elections in the face of an opposition boycott. "Its position is that the best way for a political party to remain active is by influencing public opinion and the government through having access to the People's Assembly," he said, adding that Tagammu has consistently made use of its presence in the Assembly to criticise governmental policy, both domestic or foreign.

The government, El-Sayed believes, has little hostility towards Tagammu, because its influence is limited — in the 1984 and 1987 elections it came way behind the Islamic alliance and the Wafd Party. "So, from the government's point of view, Tagammu is definitely less of a threat than the Islamic alliance or the Wafd."

Tagammu leader Khaled Mohieddin told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that his party's position "should not be interpreted as a split from opposition ranks". Rather, it is a consequence of "differences of opinion and evaluation... We did not think that the lawsuit was sufficiently legally sound to stand a chance of winning. For us, the important thing is the position we take inside the People's Assembly."

Rifaat El-Said, Tagammu's secretary-general, was more blunt. "We didn't have much in common with the other opposition parties to start with, especially the Labour Party, which insisted on forcing the Muslim Brotherhood's views on us," he said.

In his opinion, the only irregularity that took place in the elections was "the violence exercised by National Democratic Party, independent and Muslim Brotherhood candidates".

Islamist lawyers are contesting a court order that placed the Bar Association under judicial sequestration, forcing a delay in its implementation. Mona El-Nahhas reports

started the legal action."

Mamduh Tamman, a Nasserist lawyer and one of the plaintiffs, retorted: "Our only demand is to correct the wrongdoings of the syndicate's council. We are not prepared for a reconciliation because the conflict is not personal but involves the money and rights of thousands of lawyers, which we are trying to protect. We have filed a counter-lawsuit demanding that the court order be implemented as soon as possible."

Sabri Mubadda, another plaintiff, said the sequestration order should be enforced immediately "because further delay will drain what remains of the syndicate's money."

Differences also erupted between the Islamists themselves. Seif El-Islam Hassan El-Banna, the syndicate's secretary-general, said the sequestration order, which he opposed, had been brought about by Moukhitar Nouri's actions. "The Bar Association should not pay the price for Nouri's unprofessional behaviour," he said.

El-Banna, who has not been on good terms with Nouri for a long time, claimed that Nouri had spent LE7 million of the syndicate's money without the council's approval. "Nouri wasted this

money in order to win over certain members of the syndicate and ensure that he would be victorious in any future election," El-Banna claimed.

As the legal fight continues, the financial regulations of the syndicate were altered, but only slightly. El-Khawaga instructed all banks that any cheques issued by the syndicate's council should not be cashed unless they carried his signature.

Hassan El-Mahdi, head of the syndicate's Giza branch and one of the three court-appointed custodians, had repeatedly objected to the alleged financial irregularities of the syndicate's council. These included the financing of pilgrimage trips to Saudi Arabia by syndicate members, as well as the awarding of construction contracts for syndicate projects to relatives of council members.

Although El-Mahdi is an Islamist sympathiser, he demanded that the syndicate's finances be taken over by the Public Funds Prosecution Department until the sequestration order is implemented. The Public Funds Prosecution Department is currently investigating the complaints filed by the plaintiffs, alleging financial irregularities by the council.

Legal battle over the Bar

A court order placing the Bar Association under judicial sequestration, remains unimplemented, more than two weeks after it was issued, as Islamist and non-Islamist lawyers continue to fight a legal battle for control of the syndicate. Citing financial irregularities committed by the Association's Islamist-controlled council, the Adin Court of First Instance appointed three custodians, including independent chairman Ahmed El-Khawaga, to run the syndicate's affairs.

Islamist lawyers reacted by contesting the order in another court, while the syndicate's council filed an appeal with a higher court. The non-Islamist lawyers who had initiated the original legal action filed a counter-lawsuit demanding that the order be enforced. The legal battle dragged on after an attempt to settle the dispute between the syndicate's council and the 14 non-Islamist plaintiffs collapsed.

According to Moukhitar Nouri, the Bar Association's Islamist treasurer, the negotiations did not succeed because the plaintiffs had submitted "numerous and unrealistic demands. What they are really after are the council's seats", said Nouri. "This is why they

Niqab declared pre-Islamic

Legal advice by an advisory body to the Supreme Constitutional Court asserts that the *niqab* has no origin in Islamic *sharia*. Shadien Shehab reports on the implications for the education system

The State Commissioners' Authority, an advisory body to the Supreme Constitutional Court, has expressed the legal opinion that the wearing of the *niqab* — an outfit that covers a woman's entire body, revealing only her eyes — was a custom that dates back to the pre-Islamic era and had no basis in Islamic *sharia*. Consequently, the Commissioner's Authority said, the minister of education has the right to ban *niqab*-wearing girls from attending school, since his order was not a violation of the freedom of religious belief. The Authority's advice is not binding on the Constitutional Court.

The issue came to public attention in 1994, when Education Minister Hussein Kamel Bahaaeddin issued an order banning *niqab*-wearing girls from their schools. The order also required parental approval for school girls to wear the *hijab* (a head covering and clothes that ensure that only face and hands are showing). After extensive wrangling in the lower and higher courts, the minister's decree was upheld, but only after Bahaaeddin agreed to soften it somewhat. Parental approval was no longer required, but schools had to inform the parents if their daughter wished to wear the *hijab*. The prohibition of the *niqab* continued.

A number of parents contested the *niqab* prohibition before the administrative courts. Some won and others lost. Those who lost had their cases referred to the Supreme Constitutional Court. The court usually asks the State Commissioners' Authority for its legal opinion before passing judgement.

The Authority said that the education minister has the right to regulate school uniforms and that his decree did not run counter to Islamic *sharia*, personal freedom or freedom of religious belief. The *niqab*, the authority added, is an outfit that women wore in the

hijab — pre-Islamic era — and continued to wear after the introduction of Islam. But neither the Holy Qur'an nor the Prophet's sayings ordered the wearing of the *niqab*, the Authority said, pointing out that if the *niqab* were an approved means of preserving a woman's decency, the Prophet would have ordered his wives to wear it.

Mohamed Emara, an Islamic scholar, agreed with the authority's legal advice, declaring that "the only special item that Muslim women are required to wear is the *hijab*. The *niqab*, however, is an old tradition that has nothing to do with the *sharia*".

Bahaaeddin's decree was directed at schools where teachers allegedly force their students to wear the *hijab* by threatening them with bad grades or physical punishment.

Bahaaeddin told the *Weekly* that the *niqab* makes it impossible for teachers and supervisors to recognise their students. "It is essential to be able to identify pupils, but it's impossible if the girl is fully covered," Bahaaeddin said. "It makes it possible for girls to pull tricks, particularly during examinations." The ban, he added, was a result of many complaints from teachers. However, Bahaaeddin acknowledged the court as the final arbiter and pledged to abide by its decision.

Mahmoud Sami Mohamed, a father who won a lawsuit against the minister's decree, insisted that "Islam calls for the wearing of the *niqab*, and those who question that are dead wrong." Mohamed's two *niqab*-wearing daughters were originally banned from their Alexandria school but were re-admitted after he won the case.

"It is nobody's right to alter the teachings of Islam." Mohamed said. "Even if they truly believe that Islam does not require women to wear the *niqab*, it is a religious freedom and, at any rate, it is not something that violates God's teachings."



Images of malaise rescheduled

A top TV official hotly denied that *Abul-Ela El-Bishri*, a controversial series, was dropped from television's Ramadan schedule because, as its popular screenplay writer alleges, it deals frankly with the malaise of Egyptian society. Dina Ezzat reports

Ramadan is, of course, the holy month of fasting. But for many Egyptians it is also a time for big entertainment. Following the sunset *iftar* meal, the state-owned television channels vie to attract viewers eager to while away the long evening and post-midnight hours until *souhour* (the pre-dawn meal) before another day-long fast. Quite programmes, drama serials and talk shows follow one another in quick succession on two national channels and six provincial channels that can be picked up in other parts of the country.

But an expected winning horse for national Channel Two, *Abul-Ela El-Bishri 90*, a long-awaited second part of a popular drama series, has been dropped from the Ramadan schedule. The series was written by scriptwriter Osama Anwar Okasha, who earned high ratings for his five-part *Nights of Al-Hilmiyah*, which recounts the development of Egyptian society from the "feudalist" monarchy to socialism and then to capitalism. Starring the highly-respected actor, Mahmoud Mursi, *Abul-Ela El-Bishri 90*, dissects the ailments of modern Egyptian society and recommends possible cures. According to Okasha: "This is precisely why the censors objected to it."

He said the TV censors had compiled a lengthy report criticising the 30-episode serial for exposing society's malaise "in such a way that tarnishes Egypt's image". Okasha concedes that his script deals "in an open and sometimes aggressive manner" with the problems of Egyptian society. It not only deals with corruption, but with the involvement in arms trafficking, drug dealing and prostitution networks — subjects viewed by the TV censors as taboo.

"But this is not to say that I am tarnishing Egypt's image in any way," Okasha argued. "On the contrary, it is because I am patriotic that I chose to address these problems. This is the real role of serious drama: to diagnose societal illnesses and recommend remedies."

Okasha complained that the TV censors had refused to provide him with a copy of their report which declared the series "unsuitable for showing during Ramadan, the year's prime time". What he heard, he said, "is that it is not a matter of cutting off a few words here and there. I hear they want me to cut entire characters out of the drama, which is impossible."

"I don't understand the point of denying that corruption is becoming institutionalised in society at a time when we all know that this is true. Why deny that many people are deprived of their rights because of the way some officials abuse their power?"

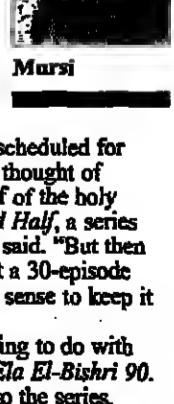
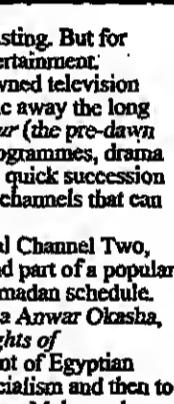
Okasha also accused the production department of Egyptian Television of bias, claiming that his series, which was produced by an Arab company, was dropped from the Ramadan schedule because it was better than those produced by Egyptian TV.

But Mamduh El-Leithi, chairman of Egyptian TV's production department, denied that *Abul-Ela El-Bishri 90* had been scheduled for showing in Ramadan in the first place. "We thought of putting it on Channel Two in the second half of the holy month, after the screening of *Rabie's Second Half*, a series which also deals with corruption," El-Leithi said. "But then we decided it would be inappropriate to start a 30-episode serial in the middle of Ramadan. So it made sense to keep it for later."

El-Leithi denied that censorship had anything to do with the decision to delay the screening of *Abul-Ela El-Bishri 90*. "The censors did not file a report objecting to the series. They did object to some scenes that were considered indecent by the standards of Egyptian television. But it is also true that they objected to scenes in other series, produced by Egyptian TV."

The two national channels spent some LE20 million and put in eight months of hard work this year to produce enough drama to keep an estimated 30 million viewers glued to their television screens during Ramadan. But those who want to watch *Abul-Ela El-Bishri 90* will either have to wait, or tune in to one of four Arab satellite stations that are currently showing it.

Edited by Wadie Kirolos



A macro-economic shift

By Mohamed Abdel-Fattah Ragab

The economic reform policies adopted by the Egyptian government since 1990 have been instrumental in creating a measure of financial stability evidenced by lower inflation, currency stabilisation and a reduction in the state budget deficit.

However, in the process of implementing reform measures, there have been a number of adverse effects, such as a sharp decrease in purchasing power due to the absorption of a great portion of available financial liquidity. Consequently, there has been a decline in investment resulting from the domestic market's inability to absorb products generated from investment projects. This, in turn, led to a substantial rise in unemployment.

Traditionally, upgrading exports is an effective way of increasing the capacity of the domestic market by diverting exportable commodities to foreign markets. However, there are still various obstacles hindering exports, and the import bill remains high. Egypt's trade balance deficit shows that imports exceed exports by more than \$7 billion.

Another feature still characterising the Egyptian economy is the preponderance of state-controlled companies. The public sector, representing 340 companies, accounts for approximately 55 per cent of all economic activity. So far, only three companies have been privatised. Selling 10 per cent, or any percentage less than 51 per cent, of the assets of public companies to employees is not privatisation. In this light, there is little room for resolution and doubt if we want a restructured economy. This is simply an attempt to buy time and postpone dealing with the real obstacles to development. The prevailing problems will only be passed on to another generation which will have to do without but deal with them eventually.

Former East European socialist countries have managed to privatise more than 80 per cent of their public sector. In the process of transferring ownership to the private sector, the determinant criteria was the buyers' ability to draw investment and to modernise the enterprise, rather than the selling price. The new buyer was given the option to retain the former employees, and the state compensated those who were laid off. The state also covered bank debts that could not be covered from the sale price.

The national economy would not incur any losses if public sector companies are transferred to the private sector without the sale of any assets. The damage would occur if funds are injected into public companies that are operating at a loss.

At the same time, governmental institutions are stifled by bureaucratic red-tape which impedes inward, as well as outward, investment. For example, to secure a licence for construction requires at least two years, involving a tedious follow-up process. Similarly, it takes around five years to obtain a licence to render a factory operational.

Another factor that hinders investment is the protracted and lengthy procedures characteristic of the Egyptian judicial system. We would do well to remember the old adage that "justice is the basis for ownership". Only fairness can generate wealth and power. There are numerous laws that were issued during the years of "controlled economy" which are still in force today. There are around 60,000 laws in Egypt that affect real estate, export and import, foreign ownership, taxes and customs and labour that require amending. The ministry of public enterprise and justice are forming committees that will look into ways of reforming inadequate laws.

In addition, the state offers free health and other services. These are outdated and far below acceptable standards.

One way of ensuring that Egypt overcomes the negative impact of economic reforms is to launch an export-oriented strategy. To this end, the quality of products must be improved so that they are marketable in foreign countries and they must be available at competitive prices. However, a few steps have to be taken to ensure the success of such a strategy. These steps include tariff cuts, customs duties, exemptions on imported capital equipment and spare parts, as well as tax reforms.

Other changes also need to be implemented. Storage facilities in airplanes are insufficient for the quick transportation of perishable exportable agricultural products like fruits and vegetables. At the moment, EgyptAir holds a monopoly which raises the prices of air-freighted goods, while other airlines are prevented from offering a similar kind of service.

The government could also assist in improving the quality of production by holding trade fairs abroad. These could be partly state-financed and would ensure that products are effectively marketed in foreign countries. In addition, the Ministry of Scientific Research, in conjunction with specialised foreign institutions, could invest in research centres to improve the quality of production of Egyptian products.

A private-public partnership would entail cooperation between the government and specialised groups from the business community to pave the way for exporting to foreign markets.

Every year, hundreds of thousands of youth graduate from technical colleges and universities. But these graduates have no proper skills, training or foreign languages. Effective vocational training remains weak. Therefore, graduates will simply add to the growing number of the unemployed instead of transforming the expanding population into a resource benefiting a developing country.

There is no effective way of reforming the educational system without encouraging the private sector to invest in education by building schools and higher institutions like universities. The private sector is also capable of managing these institutions without government interference. The standard of education, which is now well below the desired level, would improve if the forces of demand and supply determine the costs of running educational institutions, including student fees. This would limit the role of the Ministry of Education to one of overseeing the curriculum. At the moment, the law gives the ministry the right to determine tuition fees. And the funds allocated are usually insufficient to cover the real costs of education. At present, the private sector does not make a contribution to this sector, and is prevented from doing so by a number of onerous obstacles and restrictions.

The writer is chairman of the Alexandria Businessmen's Association.

Any schoolbook will tell you that Egypt is an agricultural economy based on a major export crop: cotton, and that Egyptian cotton dominates the international cotton market. Right? Wrong.

In the past fifteen years, problems in the cultivation and pricing of cotton have cut the crop by half. Exports, which once hit the five million qantars mark, have been reduced to about 7 per cent of that quantity. What the textbooks should now say is that Egypt produces just enough cotton to cover the needs of its spinning mills and that it only exports its trademark extra-long staple cotton to keep its name alive in world cotton markets.

In fact, that was how the Minister of Supply and Trade Ahmed Gweili last week explained his decision to allow the exportation of about half of Egypt's production of extra-long staple cotton, known as Giza 45, 70, 76 and 77.

Ending a year-long ban on cotton exports, imposed by the government to ensure that the needs of local spinning mills are fulfilled, Gweili announced that the government would allow about 350,000 qantars to be exported "so that Egyptian cotton does not lose its international markets."

But, coming at the end of the trading season which starts in October, the decision to export is, at best, late. The price benefit to be gained from selling in a market where supply is limited has been offset by the fact that the clients, especially in Europe, have not waited for the Egyptian cotton.

The prices announced by Gweili were higher than projected, ranging from 188 cents to 213 cents per libra (pound), but market experts said the prices were elevated to allow for discounts granted in actual transactions.

Prices aside, market experts agree that the delayed exports and the loss of Egypt's export markets are only a culmination of a crisis brought about by a dwindling crop and continued government intervention in a market that has defied liberalisation for over two years.

Ahmed Shuman, chairman of the Holding Company for Cotton, which legally owns the public sector cotton trading companies, said that the small crop forced the government to set its priorities.

The government had to wait and see how the crop would turn out, because it is obliged to keep the mills in business. However, due to the delay in exportation, Egypt has lost clients in international markets, Shuman said. Egypt's spinning mills, which employ thousands of workers, need about five million qantars of cotton to operate at full capacity.

Most of these companies are situated in an area of the Delta known as the "cotton belt", where much of the local crop is cultivated. To protect the local crop from infestations, spinning companies inside the cotton belt, which constitute the bulk of the industry, are prohibited by law from importing lint cotton. Year in, year out, they are held hostage to the local

crop and are forced to pay the asking price.

Shuman says the Ministry of Agriculture, which provides seeds and gives farmers advice on cultivation, is to blame for the shortage of the cotton crop.

"We have officially demanded that agricultural policies be modified to enable farmers to harvest at least seven million qantars," Shuman said. "That would enable the spinning mills to obtain their needs in full and leave over two million qantars for exports."

But according to El-Sayed Dalmoush, the former head of the now defunct Public Sector Textiles Authority, and currently a consultant to the private sector textile and garment industries, this

year's limited exports come as no surprise. The downward trend in cotton exports has continued for the past decade. In the past five years, from 1991 to 1996, he says, annual cotton exports have remained between 250,000 and 450,000 qantars. The only exception was the 1994/95 season, when a drop in production in other countries created a rush on Egyptian cotton, pushing exports up to one million qantars and draining local stocks.

However, Dalmoush said, the cotton was sold cheap and buyers have been making huge profits from the increase in prices over the past year.

At the same time, Egypt was forced to import cotton and cotton yarns at high prices to keep its

industries operating.

That was the year when confusion reigned in the market. Farmers realised that the industries had paid high prices for the imported cotton, and demanded higher prices for the 1995/96 crop. Eager to satisfy the farmers in an election year, the government paid the farmers a staggering LE500 per qantar before the crop was cultivated. At the same time, bumper crops in India and Pakistan pushed international prices of cotton down. After the harvest turned out to be limited, the government banned exports to protect the local mills, most of which could not import raw cotton. But the local mills were forced to buy the overpriced local lint. After turning it into yarn, they found it had become too expensive for both the price-conscious export markets and the local weaving companies. Meanwhile, local manufacturers making garments for export imported textiles under the temporary admission system, which enables them to recoup the customs duties they pay on the imported material when they prove to the customs authorities that they have re-exported it in the form of garments.

According to Dalmoush, these successive of developments, coupled with a recession in the local market, have ultimately lessened the demand on the local mills, which now find themselves with full warehouses and few customers.

"This is a result of procedures which are unwise and illogical from an economic point of view," Dalmoush said.

He criticised the government for setting price levels for this year's cotton exports, calling it a "move by a bureaucracy which refuses to renounce its power."

Dalmoush argued that in order to obtain the highest price, the cotton should be sold by auction, to the highest bidder.

Zaki Edkawi, manager of Edkawi Trading and Trust Company, a cotton trading company based in Alexandria agrees with Dalmoush that the current situation is a result of a series of haphazard decisions by the government.

"By exporting the extra-long staple cotton at the end of the season, the government is only patching up the policies it has been following," he said. "It is a sheer waste to use this cotton in the local mills because it loses many of the properties which give it its comparative advantage."

Edkawi warns that the next cotton harvest may well follow the same pattern.

"We don't have a strategy," he said. "We need a long-term strategy to be able to reconcile our obligations to keep the spinning companies operating with the necessity of maintaining our export markets."

With the cotton crop down to one half its level 15 years ago, young schoolchildren may be justified in challenging their geography books. If nothing is done to stop the deterioration of the cotton crop and the consequent disruption in the market, king cotton may soon become a forgotten legend.

Fertiliser flurry in PA

As MPs in the People's Assembly hurled allegations last week that there was not enough fertiliser on the market to meet farmers' demands, the house decided to form a fact-finding commission composed of members of the Assembly's agricultural, industrial and economic affairs committees to investigate the issue which has been compounded by an unprecedented rise in prices. The commission will also debate the government's efforts to meet the farmers' fertiliser needs in the next agricultural season.

These factories, and that most of their production will be geared to meeting local needs – even at the expense of exports. "Meeting domestic needs is the priority although this deprives factories from collecting the difference between the delivery price [LE450] and the export price [LE800]," said Ebeid.

In terms of plans for the future, Ebeid explained, the government has embarked on a comprehensive programme for revamping fertiliser factories.

"We started this programme by striving to increase the production of fertiliser factories at Talkha and Suez at a cost of LE200 million in order to raise output by an additional 80,000 tonnes in the next 24 months, while over the past six months we planned to upgrade the capacity of Abu Keir factory at a total cost of LE1.8 billion," said Ebeid.

Deputies, however, viewed Ebeid's statement as inadequate, ambiguous and not truly explaining the real reasons behind the sudden drop in the supply of fertilisers on the local market.

Alfred Wafiq El-Qayati, an NDP MP, traced the problem back to last year when the six public-sector fertiliser producing companies announced a competitive bid among local and foreign traders for exporting the fertilisers from

these companies. According to El-Qayati, no sooner were three local private sector traders awarded a bid than they rushed to export huge quantities at the expense of local needs, resulting in a severe shortage totaling 750,000 tonnes.

Ebeid refuted El-Qayati's claim, saying that not a single tonne of fertiliser had been exported last year. Most of the produced quantities are now delivered to the Principal Bank of Development and Agricultural Credit (PBDAC), he said.

"So why are farmers still suffering from a shortage in fertiliser supply on the market?" reported Mohamed El-Abbas, an independent MP from Damietta, charging that the liberalisation of the fertiliser market has left farmers at the mercy of three private "sharks" who now control this lucrative market.

Abdel-Hamid Ghazi, an NDP MP from Kafr Al-Shield, said that although President Mubarak emphasised the importance of raising agricultural production, the government is doing exactly the opposite.

"We have been told that fertiliser companies rushed to export big quantities in an attempt to secure as much profit as possible so that their board chairmen would not be fired for generating a loss," said Ghazi.

Abdel-Monef Hozayen, an NDP MP from Sohag, added that farmers, for a long time, used to buy their fertiliser from the PBDAC. But now, he said, the liberalisation of the fertiliser market has pushed prices from LE21 to LE90 per packet of fertilisers. Hozayen asserted that the drop in supply and skyrocketing prices resulted in a 10-tonne per feddan decline in the productivity rates of sugar cane cultivated land in Upper Egypt last year.

Abdel-Rehim El-Ghoul, an NDP MP from the Upper Egypt Governorate of Qena, noted that although liberalisation policies in the fertiliser sector were adopted on the assumption that they would lead to more efficient distribution of fertilisers, a group of private traders exploited these policies to realise huge profits by engaging in monopolistic practices. El-Ghoul called upon the government to give the cooperative sector a larger niche in marketing fertilisers so as to offset the effects of these practices.

But, insisted Ebeid, since the bulk of fertiliser production is now delivered to PBDAC, production capacities have risen by 20 per cent and factories now have a one-year strategic stock that could meet the needs of agriculture.

Kamal El-Shazli, minister of state for parliamentary affairs, said the government approves of referring the issue to a fact-finding commission in order to investigate the different aspects of the problem and the best methods for enabling farmers to secure the necessary supply of fertilisers well ahead of the new agricultural season. This, he added, must be at a reasonable price.

Secure with the SEC

THE EGYPTIAN Capital Market Authority (CMA) last week signed a memorandum of understanding with the American Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) formalising a cooperative and consultative relationship between the two regulatory bodies.

According to the memorandum, the SEC will consult with, and provide technical assistance to, the CMA and has offered to host CMA representatives within the framework of its international training programme in Washington. Furthermore, it expects to hold a regional training programme in Egypt for securities regulators.

The memorandum will also establish a general framework for consultation between the SEC and the CMA regarding matters of mutual interest, including regulatory and enforcement issues relating to the US and Egyptian securities markets.

SEC officials expressed their hopes that this memorandum would further extend the US government's interest in the US-Egyptian joint economic partnership programme, and would help realise the goals of the Gore-Mubarak initiative signed last year.

The signing of this memorandum represents the SEC's first formal technical assistance understanding with a Middle Eastern emerging market economy. This memo, along with another signed with Israeli authorities recently, brings the number of formal SEC agreements with foreign securities regulators to 20.

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Rédacteur en Chef Exécutif

Mohamed Salmawy

Président et Rédacteur en Chef

Ibrahim Nafie

Edited by Ghada Ragab

Market report

Manufacturing loss again

THE SAGA of the Capital Market's decline continued last week with the General Market Index losing 0.68 points to close at 204.99 for the week ending 8 February. The volume of trading, however, took another turn for the better, increasing from LE61 million to LE86.18 million over the week's trading action.

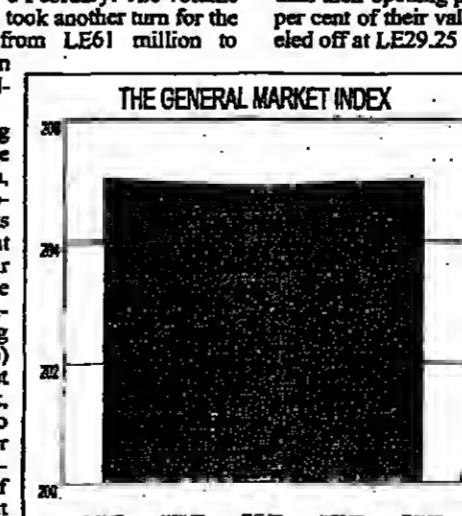
The manufacturing sector suffered the biggest blow, again, with its index dropping by 1.96 points to level off at 265.49. Abu Keir Fertilisers' and the United Arab Spinning and Weaving Company's (Unirab) shares were hardest hit during the week, losing LE2 each to close at LE36 per share. In other trading action, shares of the Suez Cement Company declined by LE0.1 to close at LE42.1 per share, but trading of the company's shares accounted for 50.17 per cent of total market transactions. Approximately LE30.94 million of Suez Cement's shares changed hands.

Other manufacturing sector companies performed better. Leading the pack was the Alexandria Portland Cement Company whose shares gained LE6 per share to close at LE339. Misr Soft Drinks and Food Preservation's (Misroob) closed LE2.75 higher than their opening price, an increase of 10.38 per cent of their value. Misroob's shares levelled off at LE29.25 per share.

Good things come to those who wait, as was the case for investors in the financial sector. In a long-awaited recovery, the sector's index gained 1.41 points during the week to close at 216.63 points. Shares of the Misr International Bank (MIBank) lost LE18.25 to level off at LE27.0 per share while those of Commercial International Bank (CIB) gained LE8 to close at LE45.8. But in terms of total market transactions, the Egyptian Gulf Bank came out ahead with one million of its shares changing hands, accounting for 44.58 per cent of total market activity.

Bridging the other edge of the spectrum, the National Development Bank developed into the greatest loser in terms of share value. Its shares lost 7.86 per cent of their opening value to close at LE12.9 per share.

In all, the shares of 19 companies increased in value, 13 decreased and 24 remained unchanged.





THE RECOGNISED leader of the Palestinian people for nearly four decades, Yasser Arafat took the oath of office on Monday as their first ever elected president. With his right hand resting on the Qur'an, he pledged to protect the integrity of Palestinians' land

and "achieve their national aspirations". The historic ceremony was low-key — an indicator, perhaps, of the great hurdles that still lie ahead before the president of the Executive Authority can become the president of a sovereign Palestinian state. Around

100 people, made up primarily of politicians close to Arafat and senior officers of the security forces, attended the swearing-in ceremony in the building that will soon house the new legislative council.

The ceremony paves the way for the convening

later this month of the 88-member legislative council. The new cabinet, which will include 20 elected members of the council and five to be appointed by Arafat, is expected to be announced before the council meets. (photos: Reuters)

The numbers game

The PLO announced a major breakthrough on the fate of the displaced Palestinians during a two-day meeting this week held in Cairo between members of the Continuing Committee, Egypt, Israel, the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) and Jordan.

Zuhdi Said Amer, head of the Palestinian delegation, said the committee had agreed on a basis for counting the number of displaced Palestinians to be returned to the West Bank and Gaza Strip under the Oslo Accords.

This is the sixth meeting of the Continuing Committee since its establishment in 1994. Previous meetings have run into problems over the definition and numbers of displaced Palestinians due to the ambiguity of the Oslo Accords. The terms stated in Article 12 of the 1993 Declaration of Principles are far from clear.

Rather, the article states that "arrangements include the constitution of a Continuing Committee that will decide by agreement on the modalities of admission of persons displaced from the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1967, together with the necessary measures to prevent disruption and disorder. Other matters of common concern will be dealt with by this Committee."

Ambassador Badr Hammouda, head of the Egyptian delegation and deputy foreign minister, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that although Israel had recognised the right of the 1967 displaced Palestinian to return to their homeland, the first five committee meetings had just set out the points of discussion.

"In the last meeting we discussed the definition of a displaced person so that we could determine the numbers and lists of those who would have the right to return. This was not a very successful approach, so we decided that in this meeting we will approach the issue through the discussion of the modalities. We will be looking at the sources of data available so we can reach a consensus about their use."

Problems of definition had dogged negotiations. Hammouda said that the definition of a displaced person must not only include those who left during the war because of military aggression but also those who left afterwards because of Israel's policies at the time. "Israel must recognise that while we will find some people have died, we must also include in the list the children of the displaced people who were born after the 1967 War." Similarly, non-refugee spouses should also be given the right to return along with their families, he added.

According to the Egyptian Foreign Ministry, the Israelis have now agreed to the return of four categories of displaced Palestinians: those who are outside the Palestinian territories at the time of the 1967 War; those who could not renew their Israeli permits for residents in the territories because they were abroad; those who fled the Jordanian army in 1967; and those who left the West Bank and Gaza in the second half of 1967 to join relatives outside the territories.

Yet Israel still refuses to allow those who have

committed anti-Israeli attacks or have files with Israeli security services" to return. Israel also refuses the return of those who once lived in East Jerusalem, those who lived on land confiscated for Jewish settlements, and refugees from 1948 who settled in the territories and then fled them in 1967.

Said Kamal, assistant secretary-general for Palestinian affairs at the Arab League, told the *Weekly*, that Israel's implementation of the Oslo Agreement is less than even-handed. "The Israelis said that after the (Palestinian) elections they would immediately take all necessary measures to ensure that the displaced be returned. Yet they are now urging PLO leader Yasser Arafat to amend the Palestinian National Covenant. I don't see why they are so persistent about the amendment of the covenant when they have not fulfilled their own commitments towards the displaced peoples, safe passage or the release of prisoners — all issues agreed upon in the Cairo Agreement of May 1994."

Some Oslo critics have argued that the fate of the diaspora Palestinians was compromised by the Palestinians in their buried negotiations leading to the Oslo agreement. Kamal rejects their criticism. "Yasser Arafat clearly warned in the Oslo negotiations that unless the question of the displaced peoples and the refugees is resolved, it would result in the downgrading of full normalisation of relations between the Palestinians and the Israeli government."

The immediate problem, argues Kamal, "lies in Israel's refusal to acknowledge the accuracy of the

list of names given by the Egyptians and Jordanians." The Arabs estimate the number of 1967 displaced Palestinians at about 1 million, the United Nations estimate is 350,000, but the Israelis "are scaling down the number, claiming it is a mere 200,000".

According to the agreement reached on Tuesday, Israel will allow 4,000 displaced Palestinians back per year to return. This means that it would take fifty years to complete the process of repatriation.

Zuhdi Said Amer, head of the Palestinian delegation, agreed that the essence of the dispute is about the number of Palestinians that Israel grants displaced person status to: "If we solve the problem of numbers, then the whole issue will be solved. The numbers, modalities and timetable would all fall into place."

He said that despite the discrepancy between the estimated quotas proposed by the Israelis and PNA, the issue had not been brought up properly in the previous discussions of the Continuing Committee although the problem was evident when they attempted to reach an agreement about the definition of a displaced person.

Amer also emphasised the importance of Israel and the other negotiators recognising that the issue of the displaced people is a strictly Palestinian issue as, after all, they will be returning to Palestinian territory. "Israel has been spreading a lot of misconception in the Israeli press about the implications of the return of the displaced people, claiming

that it will cause a population explosion and that it will not be possible to cope with the problems of employment, education and transport."

Clearly, integrating returnees will not be easy. The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics has just published unemployment figures for the West Bank and Gaza Strip which place it at 18.3 per cent; another 20 per cent are deemed as underemployed. But Amer argues, "If we are given the right to prioritise, to organise their return, it should all be under control. For example, we will be allowing those who are economically capable in first, such as investors. Then a high commission would be set up to deal with the coordination of the returnees' arrival to the territories and their integration back into their communities."

Mohammed Shahinkari, head of the Jordanian delegation told the *Weekly* that Jordan is hopeful that a maximum number of Palestinians be allowed to return to their homeland. Yet, he believes "it is not merely a question of numbers, it is a package deal revolving around wider issues such as demographics and security." Shahinkari insisted, however, that "the resolution of the displaced persons problem is vital for the whole peace process and for the completion of the Oslo Accords... Conditions are now ripe and there is an urgency to resolve this issue once and for all."

The next Continuing Committee meeting will be held from 12-23 March in the West Bank town of Bethlehem.

Deadlock in negotiations over the fate of 1967 displaced Palestinians was broken in Cairo talks this week. But, reports Mariz Tadros, the Israeli veto still holds firm

Charter crumbles as FNL changes

The new secretary-general of the National Liberation Front has triggered speculation over which way Algeria's former ruling party will swing; writes Amira Howeidy

Whether Ben-Hammouda was elected to oversee his new post as secretary-general of the powerful Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN) remains unclear. Suddenly, in the last week of January, the Arabic press published the news that Hammouda, 63, a former minister of justice, interior and finance, was appointed as the FLN's new leader replacing Abdel-Mehdi Mehri.

While some interpreted this move as revenge, orchestrated by the government, for Mehri's call for a boycott of the presidential elections, others argued that the change was part of an internal coup led by Hammouda himself. The transfer of power, which had not been expected until May, was smoothly carried out under the cloak of the party's central committee elections. It was marked, however, by fierce competition between Mehri's candidate, Mawloud Hammoush, a former prime minister, and Hammouda who beat the former by only seven votes.

The real surprise came when Hammouda made his first appearance in front of the press after taking office, and announced that his party will break away from the coalition it had formed with the other opposition parties known as the National Charter Group. "The Rome Group," he said, "has become outdated."

Hammouda, who stressed that the FLN will adopt different policies to those of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) and the Front for Socialist Forces (FFS), will officially announce its stance on "current political events" after the meeting of the FLN's central committee on 28 February.

The FLN and five opposition parties met early last year in Rome and issued a statement, "The National Charter", which called for a return to the constitution, the non-interference of the army in political affairs, the abrogation of the decision to ban the FIS, in addi-

tion to the release of all imprisoned FIS members and the recognition of the Algerian identity as Arab, Islamic and Amazigh. The charter was sharply attacked by the presidential bureau and has been a constant target of the government-controlled media which branded its signatories as traitors.

This message was directed primarily at the FNL which President Lamine Zeroual felt had betrayed him by taking such a strong swing in the direction of the opposition and by siding with the banned FIS. Asked for an explanation of the FNL's abrupt change of policy, Hammouda said: "The new era in which Algerians are living after the presidential elections made a major change in the leadership of the FLN necessary."

Hammouda's statements, while shocking some supporters of the FNL, came as a relief to others who had not agreed with Mehri's policies over the past two years. His role in creating a deep breach between his party and the government has not been forgotten by many members inside the FLN.

"With the presidential elections, the FNL completed its role," said Mohamed Amamour, a member of the FNL's central committee in a telephone interview to the *Weekly* from Algiers. "After the elections the leadership's policy contradicted that of the new regime, but this does not mean that the change was made in a conspiratorial way."

The elections, explained Amamour, were legal but the reason why some are suspicious is that they were not held during the general conference, as is the party's normal policy. "As the conference will be held in May, some thought that the change in leadership was too important to wait that long, so the elections were held earlier," said Amamour who stressed that Mehri's role, despite everything, is "extremely appreciated". "He has his supporters and Ben-Hammouda

also has his. This should not be interpreted as a division inside the FLN, rather it is proof that it practices democratic methods."

But it seems the narrow margin between the number of votes Hammouda received (89) and his opponent Hammoush (82) reflects a split inside the FLN. Half of the party's members want the FLN to regain its former official role, while the other half supports Mehri's independent line. "We realised that we cannot, with those differences in mind, elect a political bureau so we delayed this step till after Eid Al-Fitr [the feast following the fasting month of Ramadan] said Amamour.

Nevertheless, many claim that Mehri might have stayed a little too far from the government, almost putting the FLN in the same camp as the FIS. By insisting on boycotting the elections, he turned his party into an integral, if not an indispensable, part of the Algerian opposition.

On the other hand, Mehri's supporters believe that his strategy was necessary after the change to a multi-party system in 1988 which brought to a close the FLN's golden age. They argue that after losing its seat of power, which it had occupied for 40 years, the FLN under Mehri's leadership was simply acting as an independent political party.

But even after seven years in office, Mehri failed to persuade the government that the FLN can no longer be counted on as its loyal supporter, especially after the crisis that followed the aborted elections of 1991.

As the situation escalated to a state of semi-civil war, the FLN, following the government's failure to contain the violence or to pursue dialogue with the imprisoned FIS leaders, decided to join with major opposition parties to offer a way out of the deadlock. As this meant giving the FIS full legal and political rights, the army-controlled government re-

jected the solution, and those who offered it.

Whether Mehri was removed prematurely from his office as secretary-general of the FLN or not, the fact remains that his absence from the party's leadership will undoubtedly affect the balance within the FLN and its role in the coming period. Some go as far as predicting that the FLN will not be capable of operating as a powerful or independent party after Mehri's departure. This prediction is supported by the failure of the party's central committee and its secretary-general to elect a new political bureau, a situation which compels the central committee to prolong its stay in office until 28 February when elections for the political bureau will be held, and a date for the party's general conference will be set.

This means that Hammouda and the new political bureau will focus in the coming months on preparing for the conference which will undoubtedly be marked by fierce internal battles. This situation, observers believe, will paralyse the FLN's political activities till the conference is held. The first signs of this emerged when Hammouda refused to attend the National Charter Group's meeting last week which was forced to assemble for the first time since its formation without the presence of the FLN.

The FLN crisis is not the first to hit the National Charter Group. Similar problems within the FIS and FFS have emerged in the past few months, a situation which significantly affects the potency of the group. But while this situation has triggered concern within the opposition parties, especially with parliamentary elections looming, it has brought a smile to the face of Zeroual's be-leaguered government.

Sudanese opposition seeks sanctions

Despite a groundbreaking Security Council resolution, Nevine Khalil finds out the Sudanese opposition wants an even firmer stand

The Sudanese opposition in exile agrees that the Security Council resolution has disturbed Khartoum, but it feels it does not go far enough. It wants strict sanctions imposed on Sudan.

Farouk Abu Eissa, leader of the Sudanese opposition in Egypt, told *Rasha Sard* that the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), the umbrella organisation of the Sudanese opposition, will present the Security Council with recommendations to ensure that the sanctions would only punish the ruling regime and not the Sudanese people. He said that prohibiting the sale of arms to Sudan, allowing human rights monitors into the country and preventing the regime's leaders from travelling abroad were among the recommendations.

The 31 January resolution, proposed by Egypt and other non-aligned countries, demanded that Sudan hand over to Ethiopia within 60 days the three Egyptian Islamist militants suspected of plotting the attempt on President Hosni Mubarak's life in Addis Ababa last June. It also called on Sudan to accept the third-eluded Sudanese security forces and that he, too, will be eliminated if ever found.

On Monday Sudan's Interior Minister ordered all Egyptians, including those with diplomatic passports, to register at the nearest police station within 10 days. To a statement broadcast on state radio, it also said all Egyptians leaving Sudan would have their papers checked.

Ethiopia is not impressed with the steps taken by Khartoum so far. In the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa, the Foreign Ministry dismissed the Sudanese prosecutor-general's statement as a gimmick designed to deceive world opinion into believing that the Khartoum government is making a genuine effort to apprehend the suspect.

A similar lack of faith in the Khartoum government was demonstrated when the US Embassy in Sudan, fearing terrorist operations, closed up shop last week. It will be running its diplomatic mission from Khartoum.

Al-Tijani, Al-Tayeb, leading member of the Sudanese Communist Party, wants to see more of the same. He believes that the resolution has sealed Khartoum's fate. "The regime cannot wriggle out of the resolution," Al-Tayeb said. He added that Khartoum has to choose between either succumbing to the Islamist militants who take refuge in Sudan and providing the regime with its oppressive power or abiding by international demands. "Since you were believed to have crossed the border into Sudan and your whereabouts are unknown to the authorities, I order you to surrender yourself to the nearest

police station within a week."

It was reported, however, that soon after the assassination attempt two of the suspects were killed by the Sudanese regime, which is implicated in the attempt on Mubarak's life. Sudan denies that two of the suspects ever crossed its borders. The third, it says, entered Sudan after the failed assassination attempt, but has since vanished. Observers believe that the third-eluded Sudanese security forces and that he, too, will be eliminated if ever found.

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The UN sent a special envoy to Sudan last week to follow up on the implementation of the resolution. Chumuya Ghereyan, who will also pass through Addis Ababa, will discuss "how to deal with terrorism in the region," a UN statement said. UN Secretary-General Boutros Ghali will present a report on Sudan's cooperativeness at the end of the 60-day period.

Justice Minister Abdel-Aziz Shido said last week that Sudan would cooperate fully with the UN and the Organisation of African Unity in the search for the three Egyptians. Meanwhile, Sudan's ambassador to Paris, Nuredin Setti announced that his country was willing to let Interpol participate in the search for the three suspects.

IRA bomb shakes peace

A massive bomb explosion engineered by Irish nationalists in London has thrown a spanner into the wheel of a peace process that had been grinding on without tangible progress for 17 months. And there is no indication of an imminent break in the stalemate.

The Irish Republican Army (IRA) took responsibility for a bomb that blasted London's Docklands, a newly developed commercial area in the east of the British capital, on Friday 9 February. The IRA, however, blamed the police for the casualty toll, since the latter were forewarned of the explosion but delayed the evacuation of the targeted area. A powerful bomb exploded in an underground car park, causing considerable damage to the area of the Canary Wharf Tower, Europe's tallest office building. Besides causing considerable material damage and the serious injury of five people, who remain in critical condition, the explosion resulted in the death of two news agency workers. They were identified as Iman Al-Haq Bashir, 29, and John Jeffries, 31, after their charred bodies were pulled out of the rubble on Saturday.

One hour prior to the explosion, the IRA announced the end of its 17-month ceasefire to protest the British government's stalling on all-party peace negotiations. British, Irish and US leaders were quick to condemn the violence, but seemingly remain firm in their commitment to the peace process. In Dublin, the Irish government blocked the planned release of nine IRA prisoners. In Washington, President Clinton said, "Terrorists ... cannot be allowed to derail the effort to bring peace." Clinton, responding to the Irish-American community's support for Irish nationalism, capitalised on the Northern Ireland negotiations. He

allowed Gerry Adams — leader of the IRA's political organ, Sinn Fein — to make fund-raising visits to the US and establish an office in Washington, despite strong British objections. "In America [Adams] has been seen as something of a visionary, a man who came to realise that the progress toward the goals of the Irish nationalist community in the north could be made only by peaceful means," wrote *Newsweek*.

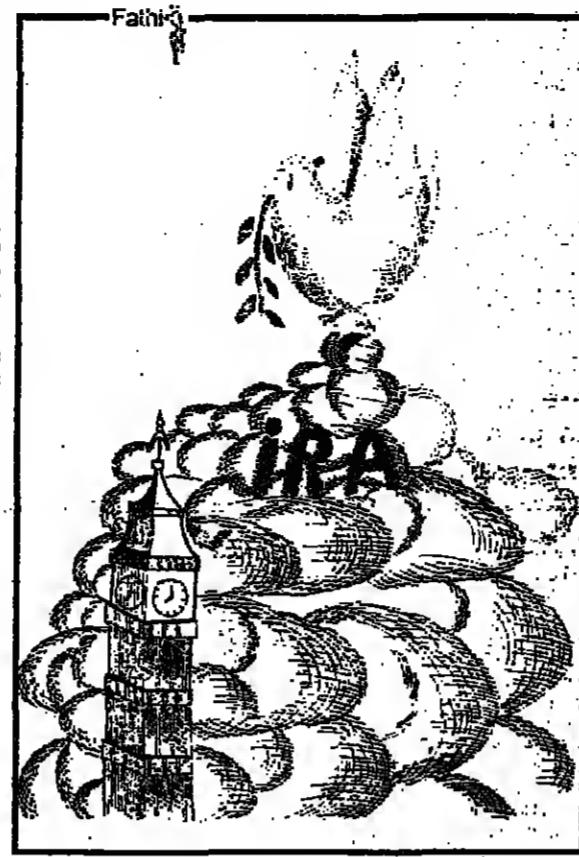
British Prime Minister John Major expressed shock and outrage at the explosion, asking Adams to unequivocally condemn the attack. "I intend to carry on the search for peace with the Irish government and the democratic political parties," Major said. "[However,] the IRA and Sinn Fein must show that their campaign of violence has stopped and they will never resume it again." Adams responded by deploreding the casualties, but categorically denied any Sinn Fein involvement. Facing questions about whether he was still in command of the Sinn Fein-IRA movement, he stated, "I had no prior knowledge of what was going to happen." But Adams stopped short of condemning the bombing saying that it would only complicate his relations with the IRA. "It would not help me with those people one jot — and John Major knows that."

The explosion unexpectedly brought about an agreement between the British

and Irish governments. They both agreed to stop all ministerial-level talks with Sinn Fein — until the party's unequivocal return to a ceasefire and demonstration of its commitment to "ballots not bullets". Sinn Fein has to prove that it is a genuinely democratic political party committed to peace and not "a front for the IRA". Major told the House of Commons on Monday. The Ulster Unionist Party — an Irish Protestant party advocating continued union with Britain — gained some points after the explosion. The bomb showed, they argued, that they were justified in their firm refusal to attend all-party talks or meet Sinn Fein until they had disarmed their weapons.

In another sign of rapprochement with the British, Irish Prime Minister John Bruton also expressed his readiness to negotiate Major's proposal to hold elections in Northern Ireland. The two are expected to meet next week to discuss this option among further options to boost the peace

process. Sinn Fein reacted strongly to the Anglo-Irish stand. "Dublin and the British government are closing the door on Sinn Fein and that is a recipe for disaster," Sinn Fein spokeswoman Chris McAuley told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. In Belfast, British troops reappeared on



the streets immediately after the explosion, marking the government's resolve to round up the IRA. They sealed off roads around the airport and mounted street checkpoints — all depressingly familiar sights in the British province. Such patrols had been withdrawn after the IRA ceasefire started on 1 September 1994. In Belfast the seeds of the conflict are evident. Since the peace negotiations started nothing much has changed for the Irish Catholic poor, who form the IRA's main constituency. Social inequality and housing segregation remain blatant and the Catholic unemployment rate is still two and a half times higher than the national average.

It is against this background of unrelenting poverty and discrimination and the British government's refusal to include Sinn Fein in the all-party negotiations that the IRA broke the ceasefire. After 17 months of talks, the government still required the IRA to decommission their arms — a request that Sinn Fein rejected, regarding it as a stalling strategy. "We were left with shock and sadness [as a result of the explosion] but also disbelief that after 17 months the British government refuses to enter all-party talks or move to substantive negotiations that will lead to an all-inclusive dialogue and settlement," said McAuley. She warned against alienating Sinn Fein and treating Irish nationalists as second-class citizens as they have been treated in the occupied areas of Ireland for the past 75 years. John Robb, from the Executive Panel of the New Ireland Group, agreed on the danger of marginalising Sinn Fein. Most Irish nationalists know that bombs will not solve their problem, but neither will the continued occupation and oppression of their people.

Outburst over an outcrop

What's in a rock? Sophia Christoforakou investigates

One sunny January morning, the Mayor of Kalimnos, a small trouble-free Aegean island, decided to raise the Greek flag on a four-hectare rocky outcrop situated 3.7 miles from Kalimnos and 5.7 miles from the Turkish coast. The mayor was inspired by an incident that occurred last December. A Turkish ship ran aground near the rocky outcrop — known as Imia to the Greeks and Kardia to the Turks — and refused assistance from the Greek government, claiming that it was in Turkish territory.

The mayor's flamboyant show of nationalism did not go unnoticed and a group of Turkish journalists sailed off to the islet a few days later to replace the Greek flag with a Turkish one. The next day, the Greeks sent their navy to wrap the flags and left a few navy personnel behind. Thus began the most recent show of hostility between the Greek and Turkish governments. The Turks said they were willing to open negotiations, but the Greeks refused, saying they were willing to go to war. The United States intervened and mediated a pullout of the Greek and Turkish naval forces around Imia/Kardia. The immediate problem was resolved, but the tension has not disappeared.

Greek and Turkish hostilities are predominantly territorial in nature. The Dodecanese islands, which lie in the south-east of the Aegean Sea and include Imia/Kardia, provide a good example of the problem. Italy seized the islands from Turkey during World War I in 1923 but the Dodecanese were officially ceded to Italy. A supplementary agreement was signed in 1932, reaffirming the cession and delimiting the maritime frontier between the Dodecanese and Turkey. In 1947 the islands were ceded to Greece.

In the recent dispute, the Turkish government claimed that the 1932 agreement did not hold, because it had not been ratified by Turkey. Furthermore, Turkey considers Imia/Kardia a rock, and reference is made only to islands — not to rocks — in the 1947 agreement.

The rock incident might seem completely trivial and the debate over the treaties a semantic tangle, but the wider ramifications is a conflict over the Aegean islands in general. The Greek government fears that any negotiations on the issue would lead to it having to cede some of the Aegean islands. A policy of open hostility has been adopted towards Turkey. The Greek government is willing to greet any attack on its status in the Aegean with the threat of war.

Another bone of contention revolves around the exploitation of the sea bed between the Aegean islands and the Turkish mainland, potentially for oil. The Greek government claims that Greek territory extends to a line equidistant between the Turkish coast and the Greek islands. The Turkish government, however, holds that the Aegean sea bed should be divided along a line halfway between the Greek and Turkish mainland, regardless of the islands.

The Greek government proposed that the matter should be referred to the International Court of Justice in The Hague. The Turkish government agreed to this, but subsequently reneged on its commitment, claiming that the court was not competent enough to hear the case.

A third area of disagreement between the Greeks and the Turks pertains to the demarcation of air space and territorial waters. European air space was demarcated into Flight Information Regions (FIRs) in the fifties. The Greek FIR extends from the Greek mainland to the eastern Aegean islands.

Turkey claims that the FIR was drawn up in this manner because Turkey did not have the resources at the time to monitor the Aegean air space. In 1974 Turkey contested the FIR, issuing an alternative demarcation known as NOTAM 714. In it Turkey expanded its air space westwards — almost to the middle of the Aegean.

A great deal of confusion was created. Commercial airlines did not know which ground control to use and finally stopped using the Aegean, diverting aircraft flying to and from Turkey on a detour over Bulgaria. Finally in 1980, Turkey withdrew NOTAM 714.

Last year, Athens ratified the 1982 Law of the Sea Convention allowing Greece to double the limit of its territorial waters to 12 miles from the coast, "whichever its interests dictate". A total enforcement of the 12-mile jurisdiction would seriously restrict Turkish movement in the Aegean. In June last year, the Turkish parliament passed a resolution which empowered the Turkish government to declare war if Greece enlarged its territorial waters.

The final dispute between Greece and Turkey is over Cyprus. The Turkish forces annexed the northern half of Cyprus in 1974, following a constitutional and social crisis between the Greek Cypriots and the Turkish Cypriots on the island.

Numerous problems hinder the negotiation of a solution to the Cypriot question. Primary among these problems is the division of land between the two ethnic groups. Turkish Cypriots account for one-fifth of the island's population but occupy two-fifths of the land. Nevertheless, both sides have some idea of what a settlement should look like. Both Greek and Turkish Cypriots want a united Cyprus of two zones. Each community would administer much of its own business but a new federal government and bicameral legislature would speak with one voice.

The post-Cold War scenario has been marked by a proliferation of ethnic and cultural conflicts, in which the US has assumed the role of mediator. Greece and Turkey are both NATO allies, but Turkey has a more strategic position, being the southeastern flank of the defence alliance and the only Muslim member. On the other hand, Greece has a strong lobby in the US, headed by the expatriate American-Greek community.

The recent Balkan crisis has shown that territorial questions are not necessarily resolved by reference to treaties or statements of traditionally held sovereignty, but are ultimately dictated by external interests.



YELTSIN'S DILEMMA: Chechen women, participating in a week-long independence demonstration against the Russian occupation of their country. During the rally pro-Russian police forces fired at the crowd — killing at least 16 people. Although the po-

lice failed to disperse the women with tear gas and hails of bullets, they only agreed to end their vigil on 11 February after seeing documents proving the impending Russian withdrawal from Shatoy — a strategic neighbouring mountain area. The demonstration in-

creased pressure on President Boris Yeltsin to end the war in Chechnya, where some 30,000 civilians are estimated to have been killed since Russian troops entered Chechnya in a bid to squash independence some 14 months ago (photo: AP)

Russian miners strike again

On 3 February, intense negotiations between leaders of the coal miners union and Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin suspended a nationwide two-day strike by an estimated 450,000 workers — that had shut down about 80 per cent of coal production. The miners were protesting a three-month wage delay and demanding additional state support for 1996. According to the deal, Chernomyrdin agreed to increase subsidies to 10,400 billion rubles (\$2 billion) in addition to paying about 1,000 billion rubles (\$20 billion) in back wages for the December-January period.

"We will demand the government's resignation if it proves unable to satisfy our demands," asserted a union spokesman. Comparing the current situation with earlier strikes in the Soviet Union, Aman Touleev, a former coal miners union leader, commented, "In '89 we struck for two months, but the state paid our salaries and premiums. Today wages are delayed, equipment neglected and there are 15 work-related deaths for every extracted tonne of coal." Chernomyrdin, however, pledged that the government would keep its promises without renegeing on the tight fiscal policies imposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

The miners' strike coincided with a schoolteachers' walkout, also over unpaid wages. By 2 February, 250,000 teachers had stopped work while a total of 600,000 struck last year. These conditions are symptomatic of Russia's economy that "has been mired in a web of unpaid debts paralysing the state and much of its moribund industrial base", commented the *International Herald Tribune*.

Social unrest is currently spreading and could ignite more widespread labour protests. A case in point: workers at the ZIL truck factory in Moscow, who have worked without pay since October, threatened to strike if the company continued to withhold their salaries. Such labour dissatisfaction strongly apprises President Boris Yeltsin's re-election chances next June. Although the miners' vote had gone to Yeltsin in the '91 presidential elections, they defected en masse from the ruling party in last December's legislative elections — by voting communist.

The Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF) scored an impressive election victory last

The recent strike in Russia by almost half a million miners is testimony to the increasing dissatisfaction felt by many of the country's citizens towards economic reform, writes Faiza Rady

December by capturing 22 per cent of the vote, or 181 seats in the 450-member lower house of parliament — the Duma. The CPFR leader, Gennadi Zyuganov, is now the most likely candidate to succeed Boris Yeltsin. Deemed illegal after the coup in August 1991, the Communist Party was reinstated in 1993 as the CPFR after an extended struggle in the Constitutional Court. At the time, the party claimed a membership of 400,000 — which increased to 680,000 by 1995. According to its vice-president, Valentin Koupkov, the CPFR differs from the former Soviet Communist Party "because it had to adapt to today's reality". Hence, the CPFR accepts all forms of private property and calls for a "mixed economy".

Like many other communist parties that reformed their political platform after the break-up of the USSR, the CPFR discarded armed struggle and the dictatorship of the proletariat. Koupkov stressed that the Communists have learned to deal with parliamentary life and the multi-party system. "In two years, the party has acquired the experience of working in the political opposition. This is new for us and difficult to handle," he explained.

The Communists' recent gains at the polls were evidently a vote against the deteriorating material conditions caused by "free market" economics and Yeltsin's reform programmes. On the surface life seems carefree and easy in Russia's main urban centres. The crowds frequenting pavement cafes, restaurants, shopping malls and clubs have an affluent appearance. In Moscow, tur-eaud women and stylish, young men patronise nightclubs that charge annual membership fees ranging between \$10,000 and \$30,000. Heavily guarded, chauffeured limousines drive the "new Russian" breed of entrepreneurs and from their various business deals. Over the past four years, these new millionaires have pulled themselves up by their bootstraps — as the saying goes.

They have already managed to pocket one third of all revenues — while 80 per cent of the people became poorer in 1995.

Since the fall of the Soviet Union, Russia has clearly become an embattled class society. Boris Yeltsin, a former minister of finance and one of the early supporters of neo-liberalism, now concedes that the reforms have failed. "If reforms mean a change for the better, then people will naturally support them. But where do you see such a change?" In reference to people's hardship, Aman Touleev commented: "I am told that we don't face the same repression as in '37 [under Stalin]. All right, not yet ... But the parliament bombing, the thousands of refugees [from the war in Chechnya], the unemployed millions, high mortality and low birth rates — doesn't all this constitute repression?"

The 1 October international observance of Senior Citizens' Day was no cause for celebration. Since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, men's life-span has dropped from 63 to 59 years. Senior citizens are paid a \$15 monthly pension — enough to buy 10 modest warm meals. The old generally survive on bread, tea and a few tins of canned food. Journalist Mikhail Jvanesci satirised the situation in the widely read weekly *Moskva i Novosti*. "We have to get rid of the elderly ... The children also suffer? We'll dispose of them as well. Those who remain won't oppose the reforms ... When old people, women and children disappear — it only over the period of transition — all our problems will be rapidly solved."

With unemployment estimated at 15 per cent, millions survive on handouts from their extended family network — the Russians' profound sense of collective responsibility is a Soviet legacy. Yet those who are gainfully employed also barely survive. Workers who take home \$33 a month — an estimated one-third to one-half of the workforce — are un-

able to purchase the vital minimum.

In an attempt to alleviate people's extreme distress this winter, the Duma voted to increase pension funds as well as the minimum wage. The vote, however, fell short of the required two-thirds majority and Yeltsin vetoed the resolution. With investment in social programmes falling from 35 per cent of the budget in 1990 to the current 5.6 per cent, education and health-care services have been slashed accordingly.

Public schools are still free, but the substandard, under-funded education results in increasing student drop-out rates. In a country that formerly took pride in its high academic achievements and produced many of the world's finest scientists and artists, the affluent now send their children to study abroad.

With an annual \$5 per capita expenditure on health, the health-care system is similarly in a shambles. In Russia, like in impoverished Southern nations, diseases caused by poverty and malnutrition have reappeared. Tuberculosis and severe anaemia are becoming rampant as people struggle with inflation rates that reached an annual 200 per cent in 1995.

As a result of the appalling conditions and the CPFR's political gains, the neo-liberals were forced to change their discourse — seemingly veering to the left. Despite recent IMF fiscal austerity directives, Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin's "liberal" party, Our Home is Russia — also labelled the Capital's Party, demands the restoration of social security as well as the country's scientific and cultural potential. The neo-liberals now also denounce Russia's political alignment with the US and the West's alleged condescending attitude.

Yet Washington was quick to dismiss the possibility of any real changes occurring under Yeltsin. Deputy Treasury Secretary Lawrence Summers said Chernomyrdin had assured him that Russia would not abandon reforms. And the Capital's Party, backed by the North and powerful multinationals, will certainly block communist attempts to transform the economy. Should Gennadi Zyuganov win the presidency in June, his hands will most likely be tied.

Al-Ahram: A Diwan of contemporary life

"At 7.20 on the evening of 7 May 1896, in the Royal Khedive Club located near the Real Estate Bank, His Royal Highness Prince Fouad Pasha, the uncle of His Royal Highness the Khedive, encountered Prince Ahmed Seifeddin, son of the late Prince Ibrahim. For reasons bearing on family strife and acrimony, Prince Seifeddin assailed his relative in harsh speech, then drew out his six-shooter and fired three shots at the said relative. One bullet tore the fabric of the Prince's sleeve; another entered his thigh and the third penetrated the abdomen, passing by the liver until it lodged perilously near the heart. The assailant attempted to flee from the club. However, he was apprehended and taken to Abdeen Police Department to give his statement. In the meantime, a team of doctors rushed to the assistance of the injured prince."

Shortly afterwards, the governor and the chief prosecutor arrived at the scene of the incident and a missile was rapidly dispatched to His Royal Highness the Khedive in Alexandria to notify him of the occurrence and a second message was dispatched to Prince Hussein Kamel and Ibrahim Helmi Pasha, the two brothers of the victim, who hastened to the scene. Then a number of members of the Royal family appeared to express their profound regret over this appalling event. As news of the incident spread through the city, the public was greatly stunned.

The incident described in the above report, dispatched from *Al-Ahram's* Cairo correspondent to the newspaper's headquarters in Alexandria and published in the following day's edition, was to have far-reaching effects on the course of modern Egyptian history. Ultimately, it produced that most melancholic of kings, Fouad I, who became sultan in 1917 after the death of his brother Hussein Kamel and who was the first descendant of Mohamed Ali to be crowned king when Egypt was declared independent on 28 February 1922. Contemporaries of King Fouad I have ascribed his gummous to the psychological effects of that gruesome event, which also inflicted a certain rapsiness to his voice that compounded his grim countenance. The incident itself provoked a sharp rift in the ruling family. That it was already beset with scruples we note from the memoirs of Ahmed Shafiq, a palace official, who wrote: "The behaviour of Prince Hussein and Prince Ibrahim upon hearing the news of the crime was most surprising. They have demonstrated that the sympathy that had occurred due to the disparity in their fortunes as a result of their father's will has evaporated in the wake of this incident." Nor was this the first time that the family was touched by scandal. As Prince Hussein was reported to have said when he heard the news of the assault against his brother, "We've had our gambler and our alcoholic; we were only lacking a murderer in the family."

One immediate consequence of the attempted murder was Prince Fouad's divorce from Shevaker, the sister of

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King Fouad I, who ruled Egypt from 1917 to 1936, was the most grim-looking of modern Egyptian monarchs. Also, he had a rasping voice that had a grating effect on his listener. The following account tells why: a shooting incident in which Fouad was hit by three bullets fired by an angry brother-in-law bent on revenge. The assailant, Prince Ahmed Seifeddin, was tried and sentenced to seven years imprisonment, later reduced to five years, in one of the 19th century's most sensational trials. The episode led Fouad's brother to lament: "We've had our gambler and our alcoholic; we were only lacking a murderer in the family." In his chronicles of Egypt's history as gleaned from reports in *Al-Ahram*, Dr Yunan Labib Rizq tells the whole story

his assailant. As for Seifeddin himself, he was sentenced to prison, although in 1900, as a result of a medical report that declared him mentally deranged, he was sent to a mental hospital in Great Britain, where he remained until 1927, when he managed to escape. Soon another major scandal would be linked with the name of the prince. On 22 June 1928, newspapers loyal to the palace and hostile to the Wafd Party published what was purportedly a copy of the contract entitling the solicitor's firm, owned by Wisa Wassef, Ja'far Fakhri and then Prime Minister Mustafa Nahas to sue for the restitution of Prince Seifeddin's property. Opinion was outraged by Nahas's use of his position to acquire for his law firm this very lucrative case. Although it was later proven that the incriminating document had been tampered with and that the firm's contract had been concluded before Nahas became prime minister, it nevertheless served to dislodge the first Nahas government. Thus, reverberations of the "Duel of the Princes" could still be felt three decades later.

One can best seize the thrill of the scandal if one follows the story as it unfolds on the pages of *Al-Ahram*. In its first reconstruction of events, the newspaper reports, "During investigations, Prince Seifeddin related that yesterday evening he was carrying his gun, when he left home to go to the residence of his niece, where he deposited a message addressed to her with a servant. Afterwards, he hired a carriage; however, he had only gone a short distance when he realized that it was not a good idea to leave the message in that fashion. Therefore, he returned to the fiancée's home, retrieved the letter, and then instructed the driver to take him to a shoemaker in the city. On his way, however, he decided that there really was no need for him to speak to the shoemaker at that time. Instead he changed course towards a pastry shop. Once again he changed his mind and turned in the direction of the Royal Khedive Club on Ismailia Street, where he arrived at 7.20pm. He asked the doorman whether Prince Fouad was present. When the doorman responded in the affirmative, he went upstairs. There, I found Prince Fouad playing billiards with several people I did not know," recounts Prince Seifeddin. "He frowned when he saw me, and I told him Prince is on guard. I have come to take revenge for your maltreatment of my sister! I took out my gun and fired the first shot, but he took shelter behind Abdein Pasha, the minister of war." When Abdein Pasha observed that Ahmed Seifeddin was about to fire again, and perhaps hit him this

time, he moved away from Prince Fouad, whereupon Seifeddin fired two more bullets which struck his brother-in-law. "Then I tried to leave, but I found the door locked, and when it opened, I was apprehended by a policeman whom I accompanied voluntarily to the police station."

According to eye-witnesses, this latter portion of Seifeddin's confession contained an element of untruth. Rather than submitting voluntarily, they said, "he threatened the policeman with his gun. However, an English guard from the house of General Granville, commander of the occupying forces, had arrived and, levelling his rifle at the prince, he cautioned him not to attempt to flee or to compound his crime with other deeds, and it was in this manner that the Prince was brought to the police station", *Al-Ahram* said.

Al-Ahram's correspondent on the scene then reported that Prince Seifeddin's defence rested on the argument that he did not intend to kill Fouad, only to injure him.

"In compliance with a plea his sister, the princess, had sent to him in writing." At the same time, he reports that, two days previously, Seifeddin "had discharged the entire chamber of bullets upon a servant who had annoyed him in some manner, and as none of the bullets hit their mark he beat him with a cane."

As for the wounded Prince Fouad, the correspondent writes that a team of five doctors — one Egyptian and four foreigners — were rushed to the club to attend to him. They succeeded in extracting the bullet that had lodged in his thigh, but "they decided not to attempt to remove the bullet that had lodged near his heart, for fear of provoking an infection or haemorrhage, which unfortunately have not occurred up to the present." The writer also observed that "every person of import and consequence has written his name in the club's visitors book when they arrived to inquire as to the state of Prince Fouad's health and to comfort his two brothers, Prince Hussein Pasha Kamel and Prince Ibrahim Pasha Helmi, who also received telegrams from His Royal Highness the Khedive and from numerous ministers, foreign consuls and other dignitaries."

Evidently, *Al-Ahram's* correspondent spent the night at the club or in a nearby hotel, for early the following morning he was on the scene again to cover the arrival of Prince Fouad's mother. He writes, "You are a courageous soldier, so fear not," said the mother to her son, after which she left his room and fainted. He was also present to observe the investigator arrive to get a statement from the victim. Its brevity suggests that the victim was still very weak: "I was standing by the billiards table when he shot me. There is no enmity between us," the *Al-Ahram* correspondent quoted Fouad as saying.

Four days later, *Al-Ahram* covers the testimony of the witnesses. Most important were those present at the club on the night of the incident: Ardu Pasha, Deputy Min-

ister of Education, Abbeni Pasha, Minister of War, de la Salle Pasha and Nicola Sabagh Bey. From their testimonies we note that they were all members of that aristocratic class that constituted the club's membership.

Ardu said that he was on his way out when he heard a gun go off upstairs. Then one of the club's members came running down shouting, "Prince Fouad's been shot!" Ardu ordered the door locked and assisted in apprehending the criminal.

As for Sabagh, he rushed into the room, where he heard the shots. He ran in to find Maxim and Abdein supporting the Prince who was covered in blood. He helped up the buttons of the Prince's shirt and to sit him down on a chair, and then he rushed to help apprehend the criminal.

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Goose and gander

For decades, Israel has touted itself as the last refuge for Jewish egalitarianism — the promised land where the long-suffering Israelites may once again unite under God. A noble cause, no doubt. Its policy of free return for all Jews has allowed wave after wave of immigrants from the four corners of the globe to return to land they deem promised to them in the Old Testament. It is, for Jewish immigrants the world over, a magnanimous gesture of liberalism and equality, but for the Palestinians displaced as a result of the 1948 and 1967 wars, it is a slap in the face and an example of blatant hypocrisy.

Put in light of recent trends in Israeli foreign and domestic policy, this really comes as no surprise to any save for Israelis themselves. Amid revelations that the blood donated by Ethiopian Jews was promptly discarded, an intra-cultural rift became evident in Israel, underscoring the rampant bigotry and ethnic racism which is masked by a veil of liberalism and democracy.

Although Israel has reaffirmed numerous times its commitment to peace, most recently manifested through the Oslo Accords, it has found it all too easy and convenient to vocalise its intentions while shying away from more concrete examples of commitment — like compliance.

Israelis, comforted by the notion that their struggle for a homeland is over, have seemingly forgotten the stuff of which their dreams and their cause was made — that freedom and peace are essentially meaningless without the most basic measure of self-respect afforded by self-determination. If Jews felt entitled to a country, then should not Palestinians, many of whom were displaced over the last few decades, also be extended the same right?

For sadly, instead of remaining true to the spirit of peace, Israeli officials have deemed it more worthwhile to complicate the issue of displaced Palestinians by haggling over numbers and names. Another smoke screen, in the form of demanding a revision of the Palestinian charter, has also been thrown up as a condition to compliance. More prudent would be for Israel to practice what it preaches and comply with the tenets of peace.

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Learning for a better future

To invest in the future of our nation requires that we invest in education. Nothing could be more urgent if we are to ensure Egypt's smooth and successful transition into the 21st century. But if such investment is to reap the required benefits it must be carefully directed. In short, what is needed is a radical overhaul and reassessment of long held objectives and long cherished beliefs.

Some reforms have already been enacted, the results of which we will be unable to assess until the students currently passing through the system have graduated. My intention in this article is certainly not to level criticism at measures already taken. Yet I would reiterate that it is dangerous, indeed well-nigh suicidal, to underestimate the urgency of the need for a complete re-evaluation of the goals, and the means of achieving those goals, of our education system.

No one would deny that it is the Egyptian people that constitute our nation's primary asset. The population of our country is the single most important resource to be developed if we are to successfully negotiate the burdens that lie on the other side of the new century. It is essential, then, that Egypt's workforce be trained and equipped to keep pace with the technological revolution that is changing the face of the world.

Since the seventies a growing proportion of the workforce has been employed in activities dependent on advanced technology. This dependency applies not only to industrial research and development but to the service sectors as well. Across the board, today's employers are looking for individuals with modern technological know-how and expertise.

To supply modern industry with the workforce it needs requires that we develop an education system capable of providing instruction in the latest technological developments. This in turn means that we must engineer a qualitative shift in the

A radical overhaul of the education system is now urgent, writes Ibrahim Nafie, if Egypt is to keep afloat in a rapidly changing world



ory and methodology.

We must aim to produce nothing less than a new kind of individual. Traditional forms of pedagogy that stress rote learning and patterned problem solving are obviously not up to the task. They have been made redundant by the rapid pace of technological change which demands a flexible workforce capable of solving problems creatively. What is now needed is a system of education that is geared towards encouraging the capacity to assimilate new knowledge efficiently, and in a manner that facilitates new approaches to unfamiliar problems. The focus of the education system, as the present century draws to a close, must be the inculcation of independent thought.

Our education system, as it has developed in recent decades, can at best be described as unhealthy. Pass marks and certificates have acquired a higher value than the quality of learning they are supposed to represent. To pass at any price has become the axiom from primary school through to university. Typifying this philosophy are the study notes that summarise reading requirements, notes that, tellingly, have come to be recognised as the

key to success in exams.

Given this climate we can hardly be surprised that the government should yield to public pressure to simplify examinations and raise pass quidemts. Worse still, though, is the proliferation of dubious institutions the sole purpose of which is to grant official-looking certificates that are not worth the paper on which they are written. And what is frightening is that very few voices are raised in protest against this appalling situation.

The ultimate goal of education is not simply to train individuals in the skills related to science and technology. It must also instil those values deemed essential if an individual is to manage his life in any given society successfully.

This, of course, begs a question. What precisely are the values that we are hoping to instill? Since a national education system can never be the property of any single group or class the framework of values that it promotes must be acceptable to everyone. Certainly work, commitment and the dedication to excellence should be high on the list of values we emphasise to future generations. Unfortunately, in our recent history, these values have been seriously

eroded. During the socialist period the vast majority of Egyptians became dependent on the state for education, employment and medical care. As a consequence they lost the spirit of independent initiative and honourable rivalry granted by God to propel mankind toward growth and prosperity. The open-door era that followed, particularly in its initial stages, created opportunities for rapid social advancement and the accumulation of wealth. The process was unregulated, and the greatest gains were made through means other than honest labour. Success was gauged not by the quality of work but by how much money could be made in the shortest possible time. Greed became rampant and corruption widespread.

There is no magic formula to reinstate the commitment and dedication to excellence. But if a commitment to these values guides the programme of educational reform we will certainly arrive a little nearer to our goal.

The media, too, should be co-opted into helping us realise our aspirations. It is dangerous to underestimate the power for change possessed by the mass media — it did, after all, play a major role in the col-

Old faces, old haunts

By Naguib Mahfouz

After my family moved from Al-Gamaliya to Abbassiya my life took on a new tenor. In Al-Gamaliya I had spent most of my time at play. Once we moved to Abbassiya, however, I became interested in politics.

Despite my new-found interest I occasionally felt nostalgic for the old days. And so, at regular intervals, I would visit my old haunts in Al-Hussein with my new friends, particularly during Ramadan, when we would stay at Fishawi's cafe until the early hours of the morning.

As we grew older we began to frequent the Cafes Parisiens in Alfi Street. I still have photographs of myself and friends sitting in the cafe, which I look at occasionally. God rest their souls, for they are all dead now save three. And of those three one is housebound. The other two, Mustafa Kazim and Ahmad Raghib, are both businessmen now. The former, of course, was the late President Nasser's brother-in-law.

One of the things I remember most clearly about Kazim was that he had had a row with Nasser a few weeks before the 1952 Revolution. When the revolution happened I remember Kazim confiding his fear that his mad brother-in-law was likely to have been one of the participants.

When, later, Nasser told Abdel-Hakim Amer that his brother-in-law thought him mad, Amer replied that he was probably right, since what was done on the eve of 23 July was sheer madness.

Once we were almost 30 friends and now, with me, we are four. The life we once shared is now the barrier that separates us.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salamy.

The Press This Week

By Hassan Fouad

building block of today's world. On the other hand, the idea of the Nation-state has lost much of its legitimacy as the basic building block in a post-bipolar world characterised by growing infringements of state integrity and sovereignty, let alone the obvious revival of ethnicity and nationalism. It is also clear that in the context of a "floating" world system still in the making, issues of identity have become critically sensitised. But the gap left by the failure of a once-inviolable frame of reference need not automatically be filled by the notion of civilisation as the new frame of reference.

While nations are anchored in given geographical locations, the same does not necessarily hold true of civilisations. In a shrinking world whose component elements are becoming increasingly interdependent and where attribution to a given geographical location is no longer as strong a bond as it was, the notion of "civilisation" could acquire a certain relevance. Still, it remains too vague to serve as a valid point of departure for any serious analysis.

If Huntington is right, an Arab-Israeli peace is impossible. However binding the peace agreements signed between the states in the Middle East, the conflict will re-emerge in one form or another. Because all-out war constrained by the peace agreements, conflict will acquire new forms lying outside the legal state structures, particularly terrorism. Must we give in to this fatality?

On the occasion of the formation of a new government in Jordan, headed by former foreign minister, Abd-Kerim Al-Kabir, Ihsan Bakr wrote an article in Al-Ahram entitled:

"Will the government of normalisation succeed?" in which he said: "It is a government of normalisation following on the improvement in relations between Jordan and Israel after the signing of the remaining agreements in Aqaba. The change in government was not a surprise but the surprise was the choice of Abd-Kerim Al-Kabir as prime minister as well as the other changes in the royal Hashemite court and the security authorities."

Commenting on statements by US Secretary of Defence William Perry that there are joint efforts between the US and Jordan to overthrow the Iraqi regime, Salama Ahmed Salama wrote in his daily Al-Ahram column on Monday: "It is not in Jordan's interest that it should become involved in plots to bring about a change of force in Iraq. And it is not in the interests of other Arab

states, Gulf and non-Gulf, to involve themselves in the same

way because the undermining of Arab legality in Iraq will lead to the disintegration not only of Iraq but also of other Arab states including Jordan itself. This is the danger underlying US manoeuvres in the area. The Arabs can change their regime by themselves if they want to. As for external intervention with US or Israeli

sources.

All Arab and Islamic achievements and victories, ancient and modern, were dependent on the solidity of Egyptian-Saudi relations. We, therefore, implore every official and every citizen in Egypt and Saudi Arabia to safeguard the relationship between the two countries in the hope that it will bring great benefit to both and to the rest of the Arab and Islamic peoples."

With commendable bravery Benazir Bhutto ordered all Egyptian terrorists on the Pakistani soil deported to Egypt. She also demanded that all Afghan Arabs should leave the country as Pakistan is not a base for terrorism against friendly Islamic nations.

Makram Mohamed Ahmed

"Country for sale", in Al-Arabi, mouthpiece of the Nasserist Party, "What is surprising in the new law is that it does not differentiate between Egyptian and Arab investors on the one hand and foreign investors on the other. In this way it will be permissible for foreigners to lease any amount of Egyptian land, including Sinai. Will this be the way in for the Zionists? Will it all end with the return of the land we liberated at great cost to Zionist domination? And what is the difference between forbidding the sale and permitting the lease of land? Will it not lead to the creation of Jewish settlements on Egyptian soil?"

prevention. It is up to the Sudanese government to take urgent security measures to round up the suspects or to hand them over if they are already in the hands of the Sudanese government, as all evidence suggests.

On the question of terrorism, Al-Masdar magazine published an interview with the prime minister of Pakistan, Benazir Bhutto conducted by Editor-in-Chief Makram Mohamed Ahmed. Entitled "Islam and violence do not meet", the interview was the cover story. In his introduction to the interview Ahmed wrote: "With commendable bravery Benazir Bhutto ordered that all Egyptian

Close'up

Salama A. Salama

A vicious synonym

One of the most contradictory aspects of the Middle East peace process has been the consistent build up of the US' military presence in the region and the continuous help provided by the Americans to Israel in developing its own military capabilities.

Certainly such military developments appear at odds with the atmosphere created by the Oslo agreements between Israel and the Palestinians. And they seem to run counter to a process that has already seen the conclusion of agreements between Jordan and Israel and the start of settlement negotiations between Israel and Syria.

Several Arab states have already rushed to open diplomatic representation bureaux with Israel. Formal and semi-formal delegations have been sent, trade agreements contracted. Conferences intended to facilitate economic cooperation have already been held in Casablanca and in Amman and preparations are currently underway for a third such conference in Cairo.

Conditions in the region, then, appear to be geared towards a relaxation of tensions; certainly, at least as far as they are portrayed by the Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres, one of the most vociferous proponents of Middle Easternism. Yet the rose-tinted glasses through which the prospects for peace tend to be viewed obscure developments that are not necessarily conducive to peace.

Certainly little attention appears to have been paid to the recent reiteration by Washington of its intention to maintain Israel's military superiority. The US has, in fact, already collaborated with Israel in the development and production of new types of missiles. Recently the deserts of New Mexico resounded to the sounds of military testing as a new American-Israeli armament system, which uses laser rays to counter and destroy short-range missiles, was put through its paces.

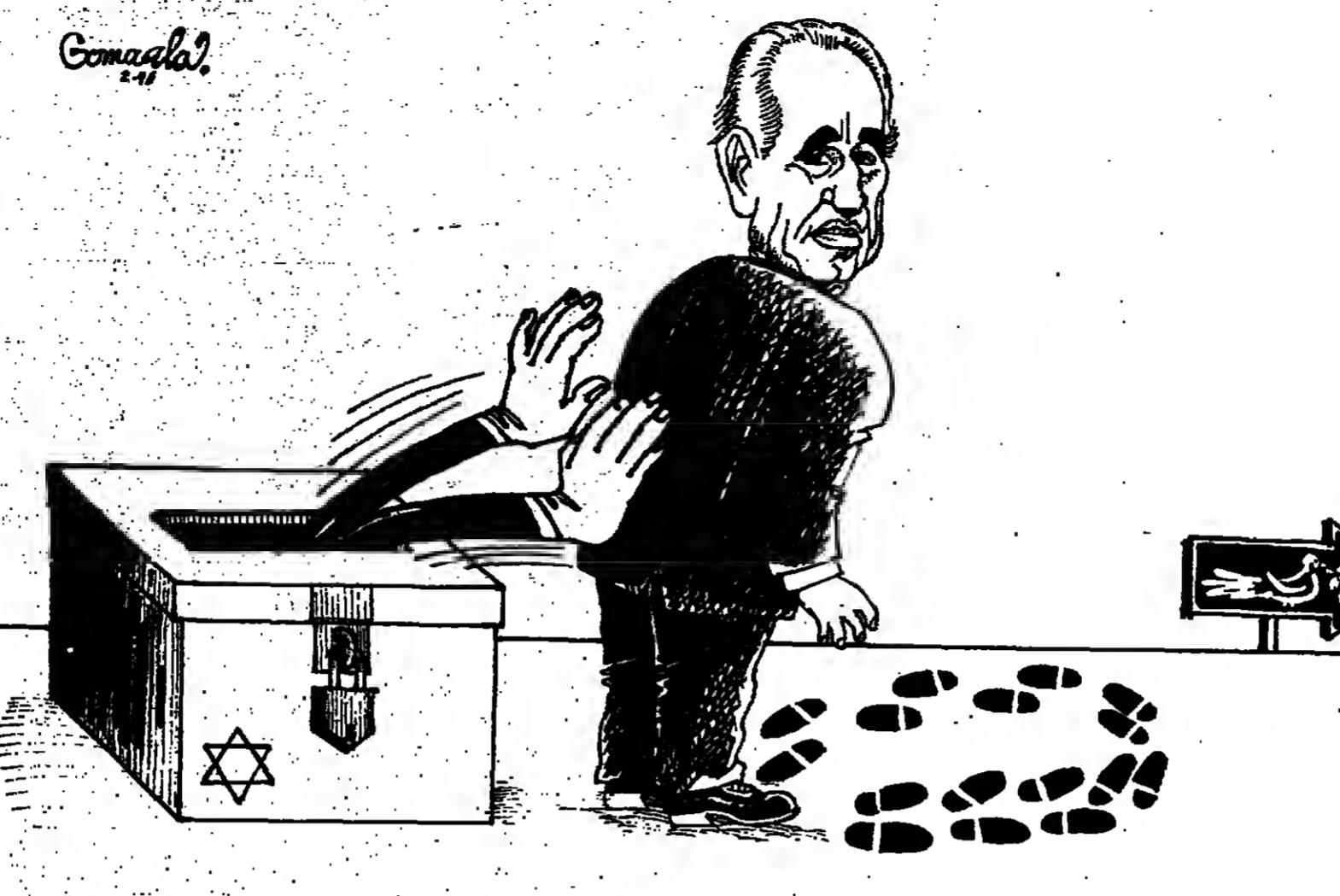
At the same time that these tests were being undertaken Israel demanded that the US stop selling surveillance satellites to Arab countries and limit sales of advanced technology to Arab governments. Simultaneously Israel, with the aim of lessening its dependency on the US, continues to receive material assistance and technology from the Americans in developing its own satellites.

Apart from its assistance to Israel the US, on the basis of a perceived threat from Iran and Iraq, continues to increase its military presence in the region. Strangely enough American fears about the threats posed by Iran and Iraq do not appear to be shared by any of the countries' regional neighbours. Yet America continues to send more troops and equipment and constantly intensifies its search for military facilities and bases.

Surely, if the dividends of peace are ever to be reaped, American military policy must be changed. For the Americans to continue playing the same game — i.e. to continue to tip the ante in the Gulf as a means to procure yet more contracts for their own defence industry and encourage the Gulf states in massive military expenditure which they can ill afford — can only result in instability, which is the antithesis of peace.

At the moment we are caught in a vicious circle. There are attempts to destabilise Gulf regimes, and the only people to benefit from such destabilisation will be Western arms manufacturers. The great casualty, of course, will be a meaningful peace. If we do not break out from this vicious circle, we will be forced to accept that peace is nothing other than a synonym for total Arab surrender.

Comaghi?

**Soapbox****The triumph of the irrational**

Underdevelopment in Egypt is manifesting itself in two ugly ways, poverty and unemployment on one hand, and violence on the other. Violence has become increasingly prevalent in a society that has witnessed the amassing of huge fortunes, extravagant spending and widespread corruption. The vicious pursuit of profit is carried on amid the unbridled chaos of market forces. Simultaneously, restrictions on democratic and intellectual rights and freedoms have increased.

The decline in terrorism should have tilted the scales towards reason and a sense of national responsibility. How is it that the opposite has happened? Has terrorism succeeded, despite its supposed defeat, in perpetuating its extremist ideology? Or has some form of complicity between the political authorities and the fundamentalist Islamic movement evolved?

How else can we explain recent administrative and legal actions such as the new press law (number 53 of 1995) or the harsh economic measures that are soon to be put into effect despite the continued absence of any moral and political justification for such damaging structural adjustments?

And if, indeed, such complicity has occurred, should we now anticipate the political ascent of the Islamist movement and the Muslim Brotherhood? Should we not prepare ourselves for the imposition of yet more restrictions on our democratic and intellectual freedoms?

Such grave prospects mean that we cannot continue simply as spectators. They demand that we increase and embolden our efforts to promote cultural enlightenment, democratic freedoms and social responsibility. They require our utmost vigilance in challenging the intellectual tenets and practical consequences that are carried by the rising tide of irrationality.

Mahmoud Amin El-Alem



This week's Soapbox speaker is the editor of the leftist journal Qadaria Fikria and former board chairman of Akhbar Al-Youn.

Reserving a get out clause

Beneath the terminology of structural adjustment lurks a whole can of worms. Unfortunately the nature of those worms is obscured by a language that is far from neutral, argues Galal Amin

The early 1980s witnessed the launch of structural adjustment programmes which went hand in hand with an increasingly vociferous advocacy of policies that purported to ensure economic stabilisation. Simultaneously we witnessed the emergence of a new vocabulary, originally propagated in International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank reports, but which quickly crossed over into government, mass media and academic circles:

Now there is nothing coincidental about these two developments. Indeed, they are as unconnected as the language of IMF reports is neutral. And needless to say, that language is as far from neutrality as it is possible to be.

To say that the impact of structural adjustment and stabilisation measures on the poor is far from certain is to repeat the obvious. It is not, and has never been, a foregone conclusion that such measures will result in an improvement in the quality of life for the poor in either the short or the long term. Hence the endless conferences and summits of IMF- and World Bank reports analysing the effects on the poor. But if the issue is not yet settled, why the insistence on calling these measures "economic reform"? Reform, after all, suggests something good. Yet we have no way of ascertaining whether the results of the economic measures in question will be good, indifferent or disastrous.

Unfortunately the Arabic word *al-istashfi*, often used as the equivalent of structural adjustment, is even less neutral since it implies putting things right. Who, then, would dare to argue that *al-istashfi* is a bad thing, and insist that it is wrong to put things right?

Exactly the same thing can be said about the liberalisation of trade and the economy. It is, after all, always better to liberalise than to restrict. Liberalisation, then, must be a good thing. The term stabilisation is no less loaded, since stability is, perforce, viewed as being preferable to instability. Yet it is far from obvious that there is less stability under tight government control than under the free play of market forces.

When it comes to talking about the poor, the distribution of income and essential social services such as education and health, the quality of people's diet etc, we find such issues obscured within the term the social sector or, less frequently, referred to as the social dimension. The stuff of people's lives is thus subjected to the kind of balance sheet calculations that are applied to the public, private, manufacturing and agricultural sectors, allowing the advocates of structural adjustment to view such things as nutritional deficiency as no more than a cost, to be offset by gains in other areas. One cannot help but be reminded of the comments of an ex-Brazilian president at the height of the brouhaha that surrounded the "Brazilian economic miracle". "Brazil," he remarked with understandable irony, "is doing rather well

Brazilians are not." Now it is possible to say that the manufacturing sector is doing well, though the social sector is lagging behind, which could mean that more dishwashers are being produced when people do not have enough to put on their plates.

Some terms, of course, can be self-defeating. What, for instance, should we think of the concept of a "safety net"? Nets are, after all, full of holes, some of which can be very big indeed. Safety nets can be very, very unsafe. Or a phrase such as making government expenditure more focused, when what is really meant is reducing expenditure on social services? Of course, all this is nothing new. The nightmare scenario was predicted a half century ago, when George Orwell coined the term *New Speak* in the novel *1984*.

Yet despite the heavily-loaded language and value judgments in every turn of phrase, IMF and World Bank reports pretend to be aloof, neutral and objective while the advocates of structural adjustment and stabilisation policies accuse their opponents of being ideological and unscientific.

At the same time as levelling such accusations, the supporters of structural adjustment busily reserve their get-out clauses. The insistence that the suffering of the poor as a result of "economic reform" is only a short-term phenomenon is possible only as long as the time periods involved remain vague. The short term can then go on for a very long time indeed. Yet even when it becomes untenable to insist that such suffering is short term, because it has already gone on for years after year after year, the advocates of "reforms" still have all the answers. The benefits that were supposed to materialise did

not materialise because the necessary reforms were followed too half-heartedly; structural adjustment was too gradual; the correct medicine prescribed was administered in too small a dose.

In a recent paper by a World Bank expert, submitted to a symposium on the impact of structural adjustment on the poor, the author managed to outline yet another get out clause when it comes to apportioning blame. The writer of the paper insisted that deterioration in social services is often wrongly attributed to adjustment measures, when in fact the real cause is "the continuous eroding effect of unsatisfactory government policies". The argument is perfectly circular. If the poor see an improvement in their conditions then it is as a result of structural adjustment. But if benefits fail to accrue, or, indeed, if conditions worsen, then the blame is placed on the continuing corrosive effects of those policies in place before structural adjustment. Such arguments are patently ideologial. But suggest this to a World Bank expert and he will shrug his shoulders in despair.

The way the IMF and World Bank present their arguments for stabilisation and structural adjustment is designed to make it appear that the wretched populations of Third World countries have only two alternatives — either to continue with outdated and foolish economic policies which are bound to end in disaster, or to follow their advice and go through a painful period which will be followed, eventually, by a happy ending. If you point out to them that the pain that is bound to result from their policies is much greater than they admit, and that there is no earthly reason to believe that the end will be

as happy as they think, they simply shake their heads and intone the same old refrain. There is no alternative. There is no alternative to excessive government control but excessive laissez-faire. There is no alternative, no antidote to indiscriminate nationalisation but excessive privatisation.

There is no willingness to distinguish between one Third World country and another, just as there is no willingness to distinguish between successful and unsuccessful public enterprises. According to the diagnosis of international "experts", all developing countries should apply the same prescription — reduce public expenditure on health and education and privatise everything else.

The problems facing developing nations are always the result of government intervention. The solution to the problem is equally simple — cease all such intervention immediately.

But is there no alternative except either the status quo or the World Bank-IMF prescription? Is it so impossible to conceive of a course of action that would take proper account of the circumstances of each country, to prescribe privatisation only for those enterprises where public ownership is really the cause of failure, and to choose freely among various forms of privatisation? Surely every country should decide upon the form and degree of government intervention. But such an approach, tailor-made for a specific country, can be developed only by economists and policy makers from that country. To give the same diagnosis to every patient, irrespective of his age, physical constitution and even of his specific complaint, betrays less negligence than an agenda that is not necessarily concerned with the well-being of the patient.

The writer is professor of economics at the American University in Cairo.

Killers under the peace umbrella

Can mass murder be excused in the interest of peace? **Ervin Hladnik-Miharcic** questions the wisdom of letting war criminals roam freely in Bosnia

You are under heavy suspicion of having participated in the elimination of half of the neighbourhood across the street. Being a prudent character you take care not to cross the road. On the other side they might not like you. But one day you and your partners miss a turn and end up exactly where you don't want to be. A policeman on the beat in the neighbourhood arrests you and delivers you to a court.

Depending on the customs in different states you have several options. In most cases you have the right to shut up and pay a lawyer to do the talking before a judge. In different circumstances you can count on the political weight of your family to bail you out with its connections. In some other places you offer the policeman a bribe and the story is forgotten. In Sarajevo, you cry that the peace accord has been breached and have your commander sever all ties with the international peacekeeping military force; consequently, the freedom of movement is abolished for all, a peace negotiator goes on a tour and the policeman has to defend himself because he appears a suspicious character.

For the past five years the media has been overflowing with war crimes stories from Bosnia. Some were pretty well documented, the UN special envoy, Tadeusz Maziarek resigned because his disclosures were not followed by international action and there are rumours that the killings in Srebrenica were photo-

graphed in detail by spy satellites. And yet little of substance has been done to show the perpetrators of the crime that what they did is wrong, punishable by law and that the consequences can be negotiated only in a courtroom. Quite the contrary.

When last week policemen from the force belonging to the Bosnian government arrested a group of suspects who had ventured onto territory under their jurisdiction, there was a lot of uneasiness — as if the action was politically imprudent and might destabilise the fragile balance of peace. A series of hasty international negotiations balanced the situation and extorted a promise from the Bosnian government that "it will not pursue an aggressive policy of arresting suspected war criminals". It looks as if in Bosnia you might get away with murder after all if your personal freedom is in the interest of peace.

One question naturally arises: what kind of an agreement is this peace accord when individuals suspected of mass murder can walk free? I put it to the editor of *Azav*, one of Sarajevo's daily newspapers. His answer was short and unequivocal.

"In Bosnia we have a developed society and a very weak, maybe even non-existent state. For the society to function we need a stable state structure. The international factors involved in the peace process are ignoring the state and investing a lot of funds and energy into the development of a pluralistic society. A democratic multicultural society sounds nice. It probably is. But it cannot issue internationally recognised passports with which you can travel, open embassies and pass laws. It definitely cannot arrest suspected war criminals; for this you need a state. It looks as if a developed Bosnian state structure is not in the interest of the international community. So the criminals walk free and society is a sitting duck."

Like most of the governments in the world, the Bosnian authorities have a law that says killing unarmed civilians is forbidden and punishable. It evidently has a police force which is capable of enforcing the law and is prepared to hand the suspects over to an international court that was established especially to handle such cases. And yet when a situation arises where the law can be applied and the sought-for imple-

mentation force is present, the peace process intervenes as a force above the law. The suspected war criminals might never get the chance of a fair trial before a court of justice, where the prosecutors lay down their evidence and the defence attorneys challenge it. The main preoccupation of the international community should be to make sure this happens. In war, the Bosnian government's main problem was persuading the international mediators and military forces that its elected president was not just a warlord, the flag on the pole in front of the United Nations building in New York not just the banner of a warring faction and its army not just another paramilitary unit. They failed. In peace the story goes on. The actions of any non-governmental organisation.

The war criminals can manage. They have presented themselves to be industrious and capable individuals. They can protect themselves. The problem arises with the others. They can never be sure whether a uniformed individual on the other side of the street is a government official or a hood. To be able to tell the difference they need the recognised government of the patient.

The writer is the Middle East correspondent of the Slovenian daily *Delo*.

To The Editor**Deep Indignation**

Sir-I feel I need to express my deep indignation at Sayfyan Kazam's severe and unwarranted attack against men of enlightenment in our country (*Al-Ahram Weekly*, 11-17 January).

Her futile attempt to tarnish those intellectuals who took it upon themselves to imitate Egypt's modern renaissance is part of a current fierce campaign to ruin this country. I'd also like to tell her that being tolerant and open-minded does not at all mean that one is Western-oriented, secularist or in any way opposed to any set of religious teachings. I can't help wondering who is really trying to "extinguish the cultural identity of the people".

Finally, I'd like to draw your attention to Saadeddin Ibrahim's assertion (*Al-Ahram Weekly*, 18-24 January) that we should promote a civil society, one which implies the recognition, acceptance and celebration of diversity, whether of belief, interests, ideas or political pursuits.

Essam Hanna Wahba, Salam Language School, Aswan

Was it terror?

Sir-I was really happy to see that Abdel-Malek Khalil's comments on the Turkish vessel *Avasya* (*Al-Ahram Weekly*, 25-31 January) were correct and built on a realistic approximation of the facts. He named the young kidnappers, for example, most of whom were of Caucasian origin, "pro-Chechen kidnappers", which suits these young people much more than the label "terrorists", which most newspapers around the world use.

It can be of course debated whether this event is terrorism or not, but there is the fact that nobody was harmed, just as the young kidnappers had promised. Some people will claim that it was terrorism to kidnap innocent people,

regardless of the intention or goal. Most of us Turks did not see it like that.

A vast majority of Turks are supportive of the Chechen cause. I am sure that the majority of Egyptians feel the same. The majority in Turkey think that the young kidnappers did not intend to harm any of the passengers aboard the *Avasya*. They only wanted to focus world attention on the Chechen cause, and they did not know any other way to do it. That is all. The acceptability of it can be debated, but do the sympathisers of the Chechens have any other choice to make their voice heard?

Khalil points out the difficulty of maintaining the stability of the Russian federation, supporting its point with the sentiments of Murtada Rahimov, the Bashkir president. My opinion is a bit extreme on this issue. I think that the Russian federation will collapse just as the Soviet Union collapsed. The Chechen cause certainly accelerates the collapse of the Russian federation by appealing especially to the feelings of other Caucasian nations as well as the northern autonomous republics, causing a potential impact on the struggles for independence in the near future.

From this point of view, it will not make any difference for the Russian federation whether Yeltsin tries to settle disputes by negotiation or by force. In the former case, not only Caucasian nations, but also other nations in the so-called federation will be encouraged to fight for their independence. In the latter scenario, they will be full of hate towards Russia. This hate will burst out today or tomorrow or some other day. It is not the future of the Russian federation dark in any case?

Russian politicians should know that Caucasus is like a boiling vessel. The only way of preventing this vessel from exploding is to avoid any type of possible heating and to cool the vessel immediately. They should give all the nations of that region the right to determine their way of life themselves, even if they want to be independent. Their independence is going to come anyway, is it not? A. Vaysel Yalcinkaya, Editor of *Mevsim*, Istanbul, Turkey

Soundmaster!

Sir-I am very grateful for the profile of Ali Hassan Coban (*Al-Ahram Weekly*, 18-24 January) by Mohamed Shebl. The writer's reference to him as "The godfather of Nubian music" is true because Coban is not only a pioneer of Nubian music but also one of the most famous and popular Nubian musicians. He has greatly influenced Nubian music and worked to improve the traditional Nubian sounds by mixing them with modern music. As he has performed all over Europe, we would like to see more about Coban and Nubian culture on Egyptian television. Shazly Ismail Bahr Aswan

New skins for old

David Blake delights in the green fuse

Beethoven *Carolian Overture op. 62; Brahms Concerto in D major for Violin and Orchestra op. 77; soloist Yasser El-Sirfy; Mendelssohn Symphony No. 3 in A minor op. 56 "Scotch"; Cairo Symphony Orchestra, conductor Ahmed El-Saeed, Cairo Opera House, Main Hall, 9 February.*

What happened to Ashraf Benyamin? No show, no go. It would have been a pleasure to have heard Benyamin conduct this programme as advertised.

Standing in was Ahmed El-Saeid. Ramadan, which colours all events during this month of possession of the city of Cairo, was given a youthful programme over which El-Saeid presided as a kind of stand-in.

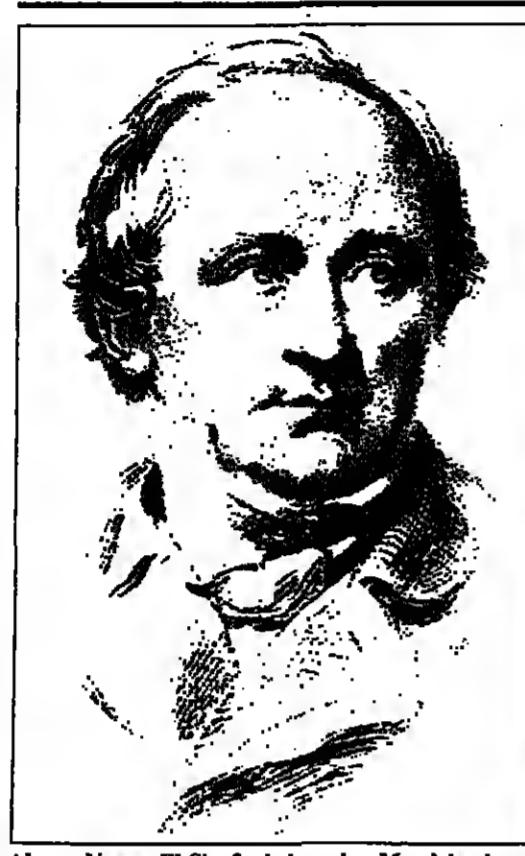
No need to dwell on the *Coriolan* Overture of Beethoven. He did not, so why should we? It is a play opener. The knife-slice chords which open it suggest the plot. Power, blood, violence and the force of youth pitted against an unpopular establishment. Beethoven territory. The orchestra sounded unsteady in unleashing such force without any run-up. It was underpowered and dusty. No sparks flew, though it did improve as the short, pitiful melody rose up within the orchestra like the last drops of blood flowing from a dying body. Coriolanus and his mad struggle! The composer found nobility in this but for the Romans he was inflexed, doomed. He paid the price. The noisy battle conscious overture ends like a terminal heart beat. It might have sounded grander if the Cairo Symphony's forces had been under greater control. Being merely fazed is not enough for Coriolanus.

Next came the Brahms Violin Concerto in D major. During the last months Cairo has had three violinists of note, Hassan Sharara, Salma Sadek and Julia Krasko, all of whom possess the sweep and dash necessary for this piece.

Very soon Brahms will have been dead a century. This performance comes just in time, to show everyone that Brahms could leave his old skin — the gently elegiac one — behind, that he could be both young and vital. He is many-layered and coloured and has withstood all the changes of fashion which might have sent him to the museums. His middle-aged presence was tough enough to carry him through old age. But now, as everything is passing through the meddlesome El-Saeid, Brahms is back as he was in his youth. He is hrawny. Beef is back in music and it is Brahms, if it was anyone, who had the thighs to kick music from the nineteenth into the twentieth century.

The three previous violinists had weight behind everything they did. Last night's player, Yasser El-Sirfy, did not. As well as muscle and brio can't Brahms had God. He was not called Holy Jo for nothing. This genuine piety, which the others showed in a simplicity often quite elemental, was lacking in both Sirfy and El-Saeid's handling of the music. Brahms has withstood everything — Nietzsche, Wagner and the onslaught of the big twentieth century Viennese composers who were almost his contemporaries. He is a fighter from the sea-fronts of Hamburg.

Last night's performance rather took him back into



Above: Yasser El-Sirfy; below: L-R: Mendelssohn; Brahms



the Viennese salons for late tea. Too much Henry James and soulful regret. This performance was nice, and moving, but not the 1996 Brahms for which we had hoped.

The opening of the D major is one of Brahms' long-lost songs from his own never-never land. He erases the years. The violinist did his best but then, when the music boils up into the emotional eruption of the ending, El-Saeid's sounds were too much for him. El-Saeid often mistakes sheer noise for fortissimo, and roughness for deep-seated disturbance. In consequence the soloist is left without options because the orchestra has hogged them all.

Cairo Symphony did improve as the music swept on. The tempo of the immense sweep and flow of Brahms was more than maintained and the soloist began to find himself. This is music of such stature it proclaims itself with high held nobility. In the coda El-Sirfy was at his best. Continuing through the following melismas he held the instrument aloft as Brahms intended.

The adagio was the second of what was intended to be a four movement work. Brahms cut and edited this work like a cinema director and the adagio is the more than perfect result. It has become one of the true holy lands of the violin. Brahms wrote his concertos, piano and violin, expressly for individual players and here, any violinist must know the history of the one for whom the D major was intended — Joachim. Like the composer he was a weak person with a huge, mellifluous tone. Called the archangel of tone, Joachim was certainly sent heavenwards on Brahms' melodies.

El-Sirfy sent out lovely sounds, always perfectly intoned without much vibrato. In fact the best playing came last. He was still improving and exciting be-

about him is unanswered — just what would European music have been had he lived?

The Scotch No. 3 is one of the best of his symphonic efforts and as usual he seems to be in a hurry. The opening is like lightning, full of flashes though as yet no thunder. He is difficult to play and to conduct. Things dart about, unfinished, unforgotten and unknown because Mendelssohn, like Mozart, was a mystery. Accept it is all you will ever have time to do.

He is the listener's delight. Nothing ever goes on too long. Effort is unknown, only resolution evades him. That might have come with age.

The first movement of the Scotch suggests a seascape. Some sort of Mendelssohnian sea never salled upon by humanity. Perhaps it is liquid silk, or energy itself.

Interesting to hear the opening of the second movement. Mahlerian — a new old way with a Scots song.

Like all Germans of the nineteenth century he adored Scottish music. He makes us weep for joy at its freshness and greenness.

All through this music the Cairo Symphony was improving. The further we went the quicker. In the third movement the strings echoed the hird song's lost lightness before the music goes darker and a tune sadder than anything that has gone before. And then the tough, leathery carcass of the tune breaks open and the glorious flower bursts out of captivity. Songs flood the scene. He could have written operas as well as oratorios. We ended the Scottish Scots symphony with a dance. It is Mendelssohn showing off his sheer physical prowess with not a care.

As with Mozart, it would be churlish to stop any orchestra taking its head and bolting off over the hills. See you next century, if you're around.

cause his view of the work and its physical conception was pure and telling. The story of a soul never lost, not for Brahms, but facing the awful mess of life while simultaneously producing the sounds of Apollo. It can catch the breath.

Joachim was Hungarian. In the last movement, Brahms offers the violinist the high spirits with grand gestures of passing Zigeuner fiddlers. It is almost flamenco. What we get, though, is an Hungarian rhapsody from over the plains of Eastern Europe not a cahier as us in Lizz. It keeps its grandeur, even with El-Saeid's flying tempo.

Mendelssohn was like Brahms — tied to the classical era but wide out and far away. Strange to hear this Scotch symphony of the long-lost forties of the nineteenth century at the end of the twentieth.

Mendelssohn needed nothing. He had everything: money, fame, talent, energy. His genius had placed him so precariously high that he had nowhere to go but down.

Mendelssohn was always afraid of failing. So in spite of everything, or because of it, he was a fraught, hassled person. Even stars have their day and so he knew everyone worth knowing in the Europe of his time was a lonely, desperate soul facing his only challenger, himself. He died so young that the fascinating question

about him is unanswered — just what would European music have been had he lived?

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Art

Concrete not ivory towers

Nigel Ryan charts the triumph of the city in the work of Alfred Stieglitz



Venetian Boy, 1887

Alfred Stieglitz invariably receives honorary mention in histories of twentieth century art. He is a permanent footnote, a persuasive propagandist in the cause of European modernism, a man who did more than most to promote that cause in America. And make no mistake about it, art in the first decades of this century was a cause. It had all the right components. Established orders were constantly denounced, the public was exhorted to burn museums to the ground and the bourgeoisie was subjected to a virulent hatred, a hatred that was, necessarily, reciprocated.

All the elements for a crypto-revolution were in place and when modern European art burst upon the American scene in the ground breaking exhibition in New York's Armory the response was phenomenal. The press had a field day. Marcel Duchamp made the front pages of papers across the country as he was denounced, ridiculed and held up as the boogy man heralding the collapse of European civilisation. Duchamp, of course, loved it, and played the publicity's darling with aplomb. But there were more earnest undercurrents, not least those represented by Stieglitz.

In 1903 he had launched *Camera Work*, a magazine that, if it avoided the declamatory manifesto formulations of its European counterparts, for a decade and a half worked

steadily to promote the soft underbelly of the revolution. It certainly lacked the impact of, say, Wyndham Lewis' *Blast*, but then it was never, really, at the cutting edge. *Blast*, tellingly, managed only two editions whereas *Camera Work* struggled on until 1917. Far more important than the magazine was Stieglitz' allocation of space, in the series of galleries he directed throughout the 1920s, to various European artists. Yet despite the progressive focus, by both galleries and magazine, on the not-quite-latest developments in the visual arts, the title of the magazine gives away both the origins and substance of Stieglitz' passion — photography. And it is as a photographer, rather than a footnote in the history of art, that Stieglitz makes his appearance at The Sony Gallery for Photography at the American University in Cairo.

The 18 prints that comprise the show, spanning the years 1887 to 1932, act as a paradigm of Stieglitz' achievement while simultaneously betraying the origins of his interest in modernism. Like a great many early photographers — the 1880s are really not too late to be early — Stieglitz was interested in the same kind of optical theories that acted as impetus to the impressionists, the softest bit of Modernism's underbelly. He was also interested, initially at least, in the same kind of sub-

ject matter. Though the first print of the exhibition — *Venetian Boy*, of 1887, is all soulful eyes, hopeless curls and beggary, he soon got into the swing of things and, two years later, had abandoned the tourist perspective of American in Europe to focus on significant moments of domesticity. *Sunlight and Shadows, Paulo*, is strikingly posed, a contrived — but no less intense for that — study of a woman sat at a table. The room and the figure that occupies it are carved up by diagonal strips of light and shadow cast by the Venetian blinds. Though technically accomplished, the impulse appears to have been to photographically recreate the domestic atmospherics that were a specialty of the second

generation of impressionists. As such, the roots of an image such as this could be traced as far back as Vermeer.

Fortunately Stieglitz soon abandoned such stilted representations. Throughout the 1890s the focus of his work was increasingly urban. *The Terminus* (1892), *Spring Showers*, New York (1902) and *Night, New York* (1936), are less obviously rooted in a painterly vocabulary though they too have equivalents in contemporary American painting. But to compare these early photographs to the images of New York produced by Stieglitz in the early 1930s is to realise just how far photography had moved from its early pictorial roots. By the 1930s the flow of cross-fertilisation between painting

and photography had emerged on a more equal footing. True, there are echoes of Charles Demuth, and if Stieglitz photographed the skyline, then Edward Hopper painted the view from the street. But the images produced are Stieglitz' own, and they are as far removed from the postage stamp sized print, *Spring Showers*, as possible. Then Stieglitz was miniaturising the cityscapes of Monet, completed practically half a century earlier. But in a little over three decades American art, held in thrall by Europe for so long, had found the confidence to go it alone.

As counterpoint to his increasingly stylised representations of the cityscape, Stieglitz was also discovering nature, perhaps under the influence of his wife, the painter Georgia O'Keeffe. Stieglitz refines his taste for detail in a series of increasingly abstract images — of sun, clouds, the branches of trees — where pattern comes to dominate subject, and the microcosm is made to serve as overview. Again there are painted equivalents, this time in the massive and lurid flower paintings of his wife, though Stieglitz avoids the overweening organic obsessions of O'Keeffe in favour of an architectural formalism. The city, truly, is the hero of the piece. And it is in the taste for sky-scrappers that the crypto-revolution had won.

Stieglitz' *Memorial Portfolio* (18 photographs), continues at The Sony Gallery for Photography, Adamant Centre, The American University in Cairo, till 29 Feb. For opening times see Listings.

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Listings

A permanent display of paintings and sculpture charting the modern art movement in Egypt, from its earliest pioneers to latest practitioners.

Mohamed Nagui Museum Chateau Pyramids, 9 Mahmoud Al-Gundi St, Giza. A museum devoted to the paintings of Mohamed Nagui (1888-1956).

Mahmoud Mukhtar Museum Tahrir St, Giza. Daily exc Sun and Mon, 9am-1pm. A permanent collection of works by the sculptor Mahmoud Mukhtar (d 1934), with granite monument to Said Zaghloul stands near Qasr Al-Nil Bridge.

Chairs Mashrabiya Gallery, 8 Champlain St, Downtown. Tel 778 6293. Daily exc Fri, 11am-8pm. Until 16 Feb. Chairs designed by 26 Egyptian artists.

Ramadanat Salama Kheir, 36/A Ahmed Orabi St, Mohandessin. Tel 346 3242. Daily exc Fri, 10am-2pm & 7pm-10pm. Until 18 Feb. Works by Elhamy Naguib, Abd-el-Fattah El-Badri, Esra Dawesh, Fares Ahmed, Farouk Wagdi, Mohamed Ibrahim, Mohamed El-Tahan and Mohamed Youseff.

Spanish Films Spanish Cultural Centre, 27 Sabri Abu Alaa St, Helwan. Tel 417 6284. Daily exc Fri, 10am-2pm & 7pm-10pm. Until 18 Feb. A permanent collection of works by the sculptor Mahmoud Mukhtar (d 1934), with granite monument to Said Zaghloul stands near Qasr Al-Nil Bridge.

FILMS

Spanish Films Spanish Cultural Centre, 20 Adly St branch, Kodak passage. Tel 360 1743. A Miracle in Rome 15 Feb, 8.30pm.

Cinemas change their programmes every Monday. The information provided is valid through to Sunday after which it is wise to check with the cinemas.

Nine Months Cairo Sheraton, Galala St, Giza. Tel 360 6081. Daily 1.30pm, 8.30pm & 11pm. Al-Salam, 65 Abd-el-Hamid Badawi St, Helwan. Tel 293 1072. Daily 1pm, 8pm & 11pm.

Alberto Burri

Zamalek Centre of Arts, 1 Al-Muahad Al-Swissi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8211. Daily exc Fri, 10am-1.30pm & 7.30pm-11pm. Until 25 Feb.

Sixty works by the artist exemplify his artistic itinerary through graphics.

Lore Bert

Greater Cairo Library, 15 Mohamed Maher St, Zamalek. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 9am-12pm. Until 21 Feb-3 March.

Celebrating the first anniversary of the library, the artist exhibits collages and installations.

Yasser Alwan (Photographs)

Ewart Gallery, AUC, Al-Sheikh Rihan St, Tahrir. Tel 357 5436. Daily exc Fri, 9am-8pm. Until 6 March.

The Museum of Mr and Mrs Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil 1 Kafour Al-Khalid St, Dokki. Tel 336 2376. Daily exc Mon, 10am-1pm & 7.30pm-10pm.

Egypt's largest collection of nineteenth century European art, amassed by the late Mahmoud Khalil, including works by Courbet, Van Gogh, Gauguin, Mauve and Rodin.

Egyptian Museum

Tahrir Sq, Downtown. Tel 575 4310. Daily exc Fri, 9am-2.30pm.

An outstanding collection of Pharaonic and Ptolemaic treasures and the controversial mummies' room.

Coptic Museum

Mar Girgis, Old Cairo. Tel 8766. Daily exc Fri, 9am-4pm; Fri 3.30pm; Sat 9am-11.30am & 1pm-4pm.

Founded in 1910, the museum houses the finest and largest collection of Coptic art and artefacts in the world.

Islamic Museum</p

A prince populi

Mohamed Shebl looks back at the innovative acting career of Adel Adham, who died last week

Adel Adham had been called the prince by so many people for so long that some of his public came to believe that his origins actually were noble and that he was the descendant of a long and lordly line. Nothing could be further from the truth. He was born on 8 March, 1928, in the *Gumruk* (customs) area, a popular quarter of Alexandria, to a respectable though by no means affluent middle-class family.

Adham's working life began in the Alexandria cotton exchange. His upturning in a popular quarter, combined with his early introduction into business circles, probably contributed to his later, uncanny ability to portray characters from the many different strata of Egyptian society. This, combined with his own obsession with American cowboy films, helped formulate the character and style of his acting. Adham was particularly devoted to the acting styles of Richard Widmark and Lee Marvin.

Certainly Adham developed an acting method that was distinctively his own, and which marked a radical departure from the characterisations of his contemporaries. From the outset of his acting career, in *Hol Anna Magouna* (Am I Mad) 1964, directed by Ahmed Din El-Din, Adham was able to introduce a totally new kind of villain to the Egyptian screen. Before Adham the villains in Egyptian cinema had been bad through and through. They were archetypal baddies. They were as bad as bad could be. They wore black clothes with huge diamond solitaires on their fingers. They cocked their heads, arched their eyebrows and in viper-like whispering lips delivered lines that were often translated, word for word, from Hollywood melodramas.

Adham, with huge success, transformed such caricatures into anti-villains. There he was with a turban, neck sweater, tight corduroy trousers and pre-Woodstock jackets, looking for all the world like a refugee from Carriaby street. And what's more, he got away with it.

His first film, although it featured screen heavies like Kamal El-Shenawi, Samira Ahmed and Hussein Riaad, was remarkable because it established the character that not only Adham would continue to play, but which would influence a whole generation of actors on screen: on the tube and even on the radio...).

Adham's second film served to reinforce his handling of the bad guy. In *Fatih Shaza* (Deviant Girl) 1964, based on the story of British call girl Chushing Keeler, in the headlines at the time because of her relationships with the British Minister of Defence John Profumo, the Soviet military attaché and a host of other political characters, Adham played Stephen Ward, the doctor, pimp, at the heart of the Profumo affair, which brought down the government of Harold Macmillan.

In the Egyptian film version to be sure, the story was thoroughly diluted. But just the same it was slumped with an adults-only censorship rating and never really got off the ground. Today it is seen only as part of the repertoire of seedy theatres that screen four or more films per evening. Adel Adham's role, however, did not go unnoticed at the time. In his portrayal Dr Stephen Ward became a stylish villain and for the second time Adham had portrayed a totally amoral character and won the sympathy of the audience.

A pattern had been set which was to be followed for three decades and almost 300 feature films. His only departure from this pattern was when he was called upon to play his "second" specialty, the "mealem" or traditional popular capitalist. Before Adham the screen *mealem* was always portrayed as foul mouthed, vulgar, pot-bellied creature who reeked of garlic and cheap liquor and had a fixation with belly dancing. Adham did away with all that in one stroke. Adham concentrated on his ability to convince via facial expressions and verbal delivery.

Over the years Adham developed a rapport with the audience who transformed him into a star. Nor did he ever ignore his public. Some actors, when the call comes to diversify, just move on come what may. Fans are the last thing they consider. Adham, however, understood what the audience expected of him. And he refused to let them down.

Some critics have written that Adham considered himself an amateur up to the last moment, and that he followed every word and syllable of a script with devout and feverish meticulousness. Nothing could be further from the truth. Maybe in the heyday of his first 200 or so films, when he barely had time to be selective or attempt to rewrite dialogue, he indulged in such rote practices. But later in his career Adham developed a ritual that he followed to the end. He would sit with the 1st assistant director or dialogue coach

and ask him to read out the lines carefully. He would roll the words several times on his tongue, mull over them for several minutes, then declare, "this is what I'm going to say..." No director or script writer ever protested because they were sure that Adham was working for the character and not against the film. They were always sure of his sincerity and candour and consequently usually let him have his way. Indeed, any changes made were usually to the benefit of the script.

This is not to say that all his roles were screen gems. As a matter of fact Adham, in his later years, expressed regret at more than half the films he made. Some of them were exceptionally bad, especially those made during his flight from Egypt in the aftermath of the six-day war. It was in 1967 that Adham, along with many other actors, actresses, directors, producers and technicians, feeling that cinema had been dealt a fatal blow from which there would be no recovery, moved en masse to Beirut. Together they churned out scores of forgettable films.

Adham starred in several white elephants, including one particularly scandalous film, shot between Beirut and Kuwait, that almost dashed his entire career. Of course one might argue that something good came out of this period, namely Adham's decision to revise his career development. His roles, even the ones

with the pygmies villain, underwent a qualitative transformation. In fact some of them have become classics of the genre. His performances in *Al-Kha'eno* (The Adulteress, 1965), as Julius Caesar in *Fares Bani Homdan* (The Knight of Bani Homdan, 1966, Niazi Mustapha), in *Al-Mazneboun* (The Guilties, 1970, Said Marzouk), *Tharthara Jawq Al-Nil* (Gossip on the Nile, 1971, Hussain Kamal), *Imra'a Ghalabat Al-Shaytan* (A Woman

(Wedad the Gypsy, 1983, Ahmed Yehya) all confirmed his popular appeal.

It was in this last film that Adham effected a change in the direction of his career. Based on a musical play of the same name written by Galil El-Bindari that had been staged years earlier and which had presented Adel Adham with his solitary stage experience, the text went through major alterations to accentuate the heroic role of

Hippopotamus) 1985, and *Al-Tha'abin* (The Vipers) 1986.

In between, though, Adham was fast developing a comic persona in a series of roles that found favour with a mass audience both inside Egypt and out. These include *Ganab Al-Safir* (His Excellency the Ambassador) 1966, *Sareg Al-Malayin* (Thief of Millions) 1968, *Akhbar Rogol Fel Akalan* (The Most Dangerous Man in the World) 1968, all directed by Niazi Mustafa.

Though he was still playing the raffish villain on and off, more substantial roles gradually came his way, including the deaf and mute half-wit in *Al-Maghool* (The Unknown), the vicious and over-sexed concierge in *Saleeb Al-Eldara Biwab Al-Emarah* (His Excellency the Concierge of the Building), the blood thirsty gardener in *Bustan Al-Damm* (Garden of Blood) 1989, and the happy go-lucky capitalist who didn't give a damn in Mohamed Khan's *Supermarket*. He also starred in the Egyptian adaptation of *Driving Miss Daisy*, *Sawaq Al-Hanem*.

Tragically Adham's last screen performance was in the disappointing *Al-Rayya Al-Hanwa* (Red Banner) of 1994. Yet even with a dud script the aging scoundrel Adham managed to pull off the only entertaining performance in an otherwise disastrous film.

In the end Adel Adham will be remembered for his funny, outrageous and lovable portrayals of the charming villain, his development of an unparalleled rapport with his public and his creation of a style that was later to be followed and mimicked by hundreds of screen and television villains. His passing away deprives Egyptian cinema of one of its most popular exponents.

Plain Talk

Recently I was invited to give a talk on British travellers to Egypt at the National Library (Dar Al-Kutub). Rummaging through my collection of books on Egypt I realised the predicament I was in. It would be an exaggeration to say that hundreds of books have been written by British visitors to Egypt. I use the word visitors rather than travellers because many of them were more than just birds of passage who came to the country for a glimpse of its monuments and a spell of relaxation in warmer climates. Indeed very many authors lingered here for years rather than weeks or months.

The vast number of books, and the renown of many of their authors, led me to suggest to Ibrahim El-Moufti, owner and chairman of Al-Shorouq Publishing House, the publication of a number of these books in translation — a suggestion he welcomed wholeheartedly. Among the works, selections from which the anthology should reproduce if it is to be at all representative, I would cite Lane's *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptian*, Stanley Lane-Poole's *Story of Cairo*, WM Thackray's *Notes of a Journey from Cornhill to Grand Cairo*, supplemented, of course, by works by non-British writers such as Mark Twain and Flaubert.

The sheer magnitude of these "Egyptian" books is paralleled by the vast variety of themes and aspects they tackle. Certain passages have engraved themselves on my mind to the extent that I regularly look them up. Of these, the sheer excess of Florence Nightingale's epithets on Cairo has always haunted me: "the rose of cities, the garden of the desert, the pearl of Moorish architecture, the fairest, really the fairest, place of earth below."

Another favourite of mine is Lady Lucie Duff-Gordon's *Letters from Egypt*. She was 40 when she came to Egypt, where she lived until her death seven years later. Duff-Gordon decided to live with the peasants. Her keen observations show her empathy with the people and, like Lane's observations, serve as a record of an Egypt that no longer exists. In a touching passage she remarks on the similarities in religious moral codes:

"In fact I am very much puzzled not to discover the slightest difference between Christian and Muslim morality or belief. No one attempts to apply different standards of morals or piety to a Muslim and a Copt."

But let me leap across several decades and a handful of unforgettable books to reach modern times. For insights on Egypt by twentieth century British writers, one could turn to E M Forster's *Alexandria: A History and a Guide*, Alan Moorhead's *African Trilogy*, Olivia Manning's *Levantine Trilogy*, and, last but not least, Robie Fedden's *Egypt, Land of the Valley*. This last I would particularly commend for the vastness of the scope of Fedden's undertaking and the warmth with which he writes about the country.

The time, I believe, is ripe for an anthology that would bring the insights of these writers, in Arabic, to Egyptian readers.

Mursi Saad El-Din



The prince of darkness: Adham's three-decade career embraced a variety of roles, but it was as the charismatic villain that he acquired star status

Books

Butterflies and moulids

■ *Mawlid Mawla Al-Mukhrusa* (Moulids of Egypt the Blessed), Arafa Abdou Ali, Cairo: Ain Lil-Dirasat wa Al-Bibouth Al-Insaniya Wa Al-Iqma'a, 1995

It would be indeed difficult for one to find a day of the year where there is no *moulid* being celebrated in any part of Egypt. Innumerable are the *moulids*, Muslim and Christian, and the shrines of saints in the country. In this volume, Arafa Abdou seeks to present an overview of these festivals, starting with the *moulid* of the Prophet and the development in the rituals surrounding it from the Fatimid era to that of King Farouk. Likewise, he charts the *moulids* of Al-Sayed Al-Badawi, Al-Shazili, Al-Sheikh Ahmed Radwan and Abu Al-Faqiq of Luxor, as well as Coptic and Jewish *moulids*. He analyses the link between popular sufism and the *moulid*, as organised by the Central Administration for Sufi Sects. The author devotes the final chapter of the book to the popular belief in the intercession of the saints, and the rituals and methods employed in seeking it. In this connection, he also deals with the celestial court, which the faithful believe is held to look into the injustices to which they are subjected.

■ *Sirat Al-Zaher Bebars*, Cairo: General Egyptian Book Organisation, 1996

The epic of Al-Zaher Bebars, unlike the myriad other oral epics composed and narrated by unknown storytellers, stands out as being exclusively Egyptian. The events unfold in Egypt and the characters are all Egyptian. The hero here is the Egyptian sultan Al-Zaher Bebars, the one ruler of the country who acquired legendary status in the popular imagination. The epic of Al-Zaher Bebars has long been recited in cafes in celebration of the hero who warded off the Crusaders and defeated the Moors. The importance of this volume does not derive solely from the fact that it is an Egyptian epic but because it is the first time that epic has

been published in its entirety in a single volume.

■ *Ufug Al-Khitab Al-Naqdi* (The Horizon of the Critical Discourse), Sabri Hafez, Cairo: Dar Sharqiyah, 1996

This volume brings together a number of essays by critic Sabri Hafez on critical theory, as well as applied readings. Among his essays on theory are ones on inter-textuality and the semiotics of literary texts, an introduction to the sociology of literature, the functions of critical discourse and the literature of the Other. As for the section of applied readings, it brings together critiques of works by Gunter Grass, Adonis, Kamal Abou Deeb, Edwar El-Karrar, Mahmoud Shaker and Padwa Malti-Douglas. The volume bears the hallmark of Sabri Hafez's work: methodological rigour and a keen concern for the vital issues of Arab culture.

■ *Ahmed Hegazi, Al-Sho'ir Al-Mu'asir* (Ahmed Hegazi, Contemporary Poet), Mustafa Nassif, Cairo: General Egyptian Book Organisation, 1996

Mustafa Nassif here provides a distinguished study of the poetry of Ahmed Abdel-Monei Hegazi who has been writing since the early fifties and has left an indisputable imprint on the modern Arab poem. The study is in seven chapters, tackling among other things the poet's linguistic innovation.

■ *Istirid Al-Mustaqqal* (Reclaiming the Future), Cairo: Dar Al-Mustaqbal Al-'Arabi, 1995

Leader of the Algerian Revolution, first president of independent Algeria, living under house arrest for almost 20 years, Ahmed

Bin Bella speaks out in this book. The book consists of a lengthy interview with Bin Bella by Libyan writer Samy Latif on such topics as current struggles, nationalism and universalism,

the changing world order and relations with the West, and finally on cultural hegemony. The reader comes to the conclusion that Bin Bella considers that the main issue currently at stake for Arabs vis-à-vis the West is primarily a cultural and intellectual one.

■ *Sayid Al-Farashat* (Catching Butterflies), Mohamed Saleh, Cairo: General Egyptian Book Organisation, 1996

Sayid Al-Farashat (Catching Butterflies) is the third poetry collection by Mohamed Saleh. Indeed, the poems in discrete entities but rather as an organic unity that seeks to portray an apprehensive, benevolent state of being. The volume can be considered a landmark on the current scene of the prose poem in Egypt for despite the apparent simplicity, Mohamed Saleh is unique in foregrounding the concision of scenes and exploring knowledge through an exceed-

ingly spare language.

■ *Al-Isharat Al-Ilaheya* (Divine Signs), Abu Hayan Al-Tawhid, ed. Abdel-Rahman Badawi, Cairo: Hay'at Qusour Al-Thaqafa, 1996

The second book in the *Zakhira* (Treasures) series, launched recently by Hay'at Qusour Al-Thaqafa, is a rare manuscript of Abu Hayan Al-Tawhid's *Al-Isharat Al-Ilaheya* (Divine Signs), edited by Dr Abdel-Rahman Badawi. The revival of interest in Al-Tawhid owes not little to the commemorative festival recently held in Cairo — a revival all the more ironical since this master of Arab prose who lived in great poverty in the 4th century AH was not given any acknowledgment except recently.

■ *Fi Al-Fikr Al-Masri Al-Hodith: Muhawala Fi I'adat Al-Tajfir* (On Modern Egyptian Thought: Towards Re-interpretation), Ezzat Quran, Cairo: General Egyptian Book Organisation, 1995

In this, his most recent book, Ezzat Quran reinterprets the cultural concepts of the homeland, the nation and the citizen in modern Egypt. He presents a comparative study between Rifai's *Al-Tahawwur*, *Takhlis Al-Birz* and *Takhlis Bariz* (Extracting Gold in the Deserts of Paris) and Abdulla Fikry's *Ishrat Al-Albab Ila Mahasin Orobba* (Guiding Souls to the Virtues of Europe). He also discusses the stance towards Egyptian nationalism demands adopted by *Al-Urwa Al-Wuthqa*, the newspaper produced by Gamal Al-Din Al-Afifi and Al-Sheikh Mohamed Abdou in 1884. He then turns to the concept of Al-Gam'a Al-Islamiya between 1876 and 1909. The following chapters tackle, in more general terms, Egyptian thought vis-à-vis the West between 1798 and 1914.

The paper chase

The winds of environmental change are blowing in Egypt but, asks Tarek El-Tablawy, are they strong enough to clean the air over Cairo

It is with a good deal of consternation, frustration and dedication that Mohamed El-Gazzar approaches environmental reform in Egypt. A geologist by trade, El-Gazzar found himself, over the course of his career spanning more than 20 years, drawn to environmental issues.

His interest, however, goes much deeper than that of the generic tree-hugger. El-Gazzar, who is the chairman of the Environmental Protection and Development Society in the Pyramid Gardens, is also the fellow who raised a stink when the government proposed to build the Ring Road project around the pyramids, prompting UNESCO, the knight in pale blue armour, to get involved. As a result, President Hosni Mubarak intervened, the entire Giza Plateau was declared a protected zone and the Ring Road was rerouted. This may have been a battle won for El-Gazzar, but the war is far from over.

Although the government has launched a variety of green initiatives designed to go hand-in-hand with the economic reform programme kicked off in 1991, El-Gazzar is not really impressed. "The environment is not their first priority," he declared. "What politicians need or require comes first then comes the environment."

There is a strong measure of truth to what he says. Like many other developing nations, Egypt has laid down a long paper trail of environmental legislation. Unfortunately, it has been just that — a paper trail. "There is Law 48 of 1982 which deals with the protection of the Nile, and Law 38 which deals with solid waste disposal," explained Doss Abd-el-Messel of the Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency (EEAA). The EEAA is the body charged with the onerous task of developing environmental policies in Egypt. "Law 48, unfortunately, is generally considered to be one of the laws that have not been applied; the grace period it specified for industrial compliance was too short and the water purity standards unrealistic," she said.

It was not until 1992, when the Environmental Action Plan (EAP) was devised by the EEAA, that a substantive reform effort was truly undertaken. The EAP, which would later give birth to Law 4 of 1994, called for the total phase-out of energy subsidies by 1995, the introduction of a gasoline tax after 1995, reduction of the level of lead in gasoline, establishing a vehicle emission certification process, formulating air emission policies and developing public awareness of the serious impact of air pollution. These measures may have come a little too late but, argue many, they are a step in the right direction.

El-Gazzar, however, remains unconvinced. "Officials will tell you we are doing something, but this is just on paper. It will never happen," he argued. Looking at the task ahead, it is easy to understand El-Gazzar's scepticism. Figures stored away in the archives of various ministries, as well as those disclosed in several United States Agency for International Development (USAID) comparative risk assessment reports, reveal that air pollution levels in Cairo are five to ten times greater than those in the US for example, and are the highest recorded among the world's 20 mega cities. Other statistics reveal that on average, 16,000 people per year die as a result of illness brought on by suspended particulates and three to nine work days per person, per year, are lost due to pollution-related illness. Moreover, the pollution from industries, diesel fuels, power plants, construction, trash burning, desert dust and lead cause higher blood pressure, anaemia, kidney disease and impaired fertility in adults. In children, it causes increased rates of infant mortality and loss of intelligence. In fact, rates of lead concentration in Cairo are astounding, 1.9-10.0 micrograms per cubic metre ($\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$). Comparably, this figure is the highest recorded anywhere in the world, and more than three times that of lead in Bangkok and Mexico City — two of the world's most polluted cities.

Reciting these figures to El-Gazzar will only prompt him to give you a "Tell me something I don't already know" look. But Salah Hafez, head of the EEAA is more diplomatic — and optimistic. The main problem, according to Hafez, is one of enforcing realistic standards. And this, he says, can only be accomplished in a piecemeal fashion in conjunction with a public awareness campaign.

"We're trying to implement a 'command and control' method whereby attainable goals are set and the public is given ample time to comply with them," said Hafez. Feasibility and ample time, in this case, are lower-than-international standards and a three-year grace period for compliance with vehicle emission controls. "Mainly this is because 60-70 per cent of the cars on the roads in Greater Cairo would fail European emission standards. If, over the next few years, we can tackle the issue with about 25 per cent of the cars, then this is a step in the right direction."

In fact, Law 4 of 1994 is basically a stepping stone to enforceable environmental policy-making. The law, which is dubbed as the first unified piece of Egyptian environmental legislation, is designed to strengthen the role of the EEAA, set environmental impact procedures, emission standards, and other standards for toxic waste disposal, chemical spraying, open burning and other industrial waste disposal. Along with the executive regulations of the law, which were passed in 1995, the way the EEAA plans to enforce these guidelines is through public awareness campaigns, feasibility studies and impact assessment reports. "Unlike in developed countries, the public in developing countries must be made aware of the laws and its ramifications through appropriate media such as television, radio or the print media," noted Hafez.

On paper, this policy is sound, but by Hafez's own admission, much of this PR programme is in the preparatory stage. "We're still doing a lot of preparatory work right now," he said. But in terms of the nuts and bolts of the law, the provisions and requirements are clearly spelled out. Hafez explained that the law gives new and established industries a three-year grace period to comply with it. If they fail to do so after this period, the EEAA can negotiate an extension of the grace period with the industries. They could qualify for two consecutive one-year extensions.

"For industries to qualify for the grace period, they must prove that they have begun to comply and simply need the time to complete impact assessment or to target problem areas," explained Hafez. "But, in the end, it's their problem, not ours, although it is in our best interest to help them take decisive action." If, after the extension of the grace period, the industries have yet to comply, then the EEAA can initiate legal action against them, but only after contacting the ministry under whose purview the factory or business falls.

Such an arrangement has the potential of pitting the EEAA at loggerheads with various ministries which may deem it in their interest to overlook the transgressions of an industry. But, says Hafez, "We're not afraid to step on the ministries' toes and show our teeth." However, the responsibility for enforcement, he adds, does not fall only on the shoulders of the EEAA. "If the law was designed to enable us to have direct contact, then we would be responsible for the environment; we're not responsible for the environment," he said. "We're there to enforce compliance, not to do other people's jobs for them. We're operating from a polluter-based principle," clarified Hafez.

The businesses and the respective ministries know their respective industries better than we do. As such, they are responsible for designing an environmentally-friendly system and complying with the Executive Regulations. The EEAA, he adds, is there to advise, assist and finally, if nothing else works, to penalise.

Assisting the EEAA in its quest for clean air and bishazia-free water is USAID. An official at USAID's environmental programme explained that to date, USAID has either sponsored, funded or spearheaded several initiatives such as the Source Receptor Study which began this month, the Law 4 Awareness Campaign, the Vehicle Tune-up Programme which is designed to lower carbon dioxide emissions from cars and increase fuel efficiency and the Air Emissions Regulations Assessment (starting April 1996).

Like the EEAA's activities, USAID's plans are designed to tackle the country's environmental problems from a grass roots level. Public awareness is a priority, as are realistic standards and facilitating compliance. But officials at USAID are more pragmatic. "Bureaucracy doesn't move at the speed of light," said the USAID official, implying that it's best to approach this issue with a bit of patience.

As El-Gazzar notes, these reforms seem well-intentioned, albeit overdue. Hafez denies that the legislation was enacted as a result of pressure by donor agencies to see Egypt devise a tangible environmental policy because they were no longer willing to throw good money after bad. But said the USAID official, "There was some encouragement on the part of donor countries to see Egypt embark on a sustainable environmental programme."

Sustainability, however, implies that the planning process is not just for future endeavours but also encompasses curbing present shortcomings. And of those, there are many. "The 6th of October City is a case in point," said El-Gazzar. That city, he said, is built on a 10-15 metre layer of shale and clay which is impermeable and unable to absorb run-off water. Once the several hundred factories already constructed or being built go on-line, waste disposal will be a major problem. The potential consequences will be that the foundations of the buildings will begin to erode in a little over a decade, he asserted. "We've heard these claims," said Hafez, "but they haven't been verified."

Purple rain



Prime pollutants: poisonous fumes fizzing into the open air represent a serious health hazard and a damage to the environment

Dust in the wind

Driving into the industrial district of Helwan you are more often than not greeted by dust, lots of dust. In fact, millions and millions of dust particles from cement factories hang suspended in the air around Helwan, creating a gloomy and uncomfortable atmosphere, to say the least. Passers-by might feel irritable to the eyes, throat, nose and perhaps skin. But for the residents of this and nearby areas, the prolonged effects of this dust can be much more damaging.

Present day Helwan, a major suburb south of Cairo, is a far cry from what it used to be a few decades ago. In the 1940s and 1950s it was an ideal place for picnics, with many public gardens, sulphur baths and an adjoining hotel for the resort's visitors.

For those who live in Helwan now, the statistics do not look good. A survey of areas close to the cement factories in Helwan showed that 29 per cent of school children suffer from lung diseases, compared to nine per cent in rural areas. Moreover, the mortality rate due to chest diseases in Helwan is 19 per cent for all social classes. Other reports have shown that environmental conditions in Helwan cause significantly higher incidence of respiratory disease, bronchitis and asthmatic bronchitis, than other areas of greater Cairo.

An extremely high level of particulate matter (PM) creates this health risk (particulate matter represents a broad class of chemically and physically diverse substances that exist as discrete particles suspended in air). Concentrations of suspended particles in Helwan have been recorded at levels 10 times any standards set to protect residential industrial areas, according to a report by the Project in Development and the Environment (PRIDE), an American consulting firm. And it is the three cement factories there

which are largely responsible: "Every year they dump over two million metric tonnes of dust into the sky," the report stated.

Over 10 years after discovering the health risks and environmental damage the Helwan cement factories were causing, something is finally being done about it. To safeguard the environment, Law 4 of 1994 set standards for the maximum permissible emissions from cement factories. It also set a three-year grace period, subject to extension, for compliance. Most importantly the law defined satisfactory emissions at 250-500 micrograms per cubic metre ($\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$), a far cry from the 50000 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ which was previously observed.

"If the companies in Helwan properly repair and maintain their filters, the problem of emissions will be practically non-existent," explained Mustafa Abu Zeid, cement manufacturing expert at United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency (EEAA). "Despite the fact that international standards expect a more stringent 150 μg per cubic metre for emissions, with the Egyptian standards we will still experience very nice weather and few health risks," he added.

Although most are ready to live with the emissions standards, not many are content with the law. "The law is inadequate. It leaves many loopholes for the industries and does not specify suitable means of implementation," voiced one environmentalist, who did not wish to be identified. Abu Zeid agreed, saying: "The law is not satisfactory. A law should be issued to be implemented but Law 4 has been left floating. Just how will it be enforced and who will be responsible?"

Even EEAA officials themselves seem at a

loss. "The law is definitely adequate to improve the situation but the problem is implementation. Implementation is most important and I believe that everyone in the country is responsible for this aspect," said Mohamed El-Zarka, director of environmental protection against solid wastes and toxic substances at EEAA. "One positive result, already apparent, is that it attracted people's attention and improved environmental awareness greatly," El-Zarka added.

Aside from the possible shortcomings of the law, action has already been taken to clean the air in Helwan. A newly founded company, Arab Swiss Engineering and Environmental Protection Company (ASENPRO), recently signed contracts with two of the Helwan cement factories, to take on the task of combating pollution.

"These several million pound contracts make us [ASENPRO] responsible for repairing and maintaining kilo filters to bring emissions in line with the guidelines set by Law 4 within two years," ASENPRO Managing Director Khalid Zaki said. "We are currently negotiating with the third company and hope to sign a contract with them soon," Zaki added.

Until recently the filters on cement factories were non-operational. They were not repaired or maintained and in most cases were not even turned on. And, on the rare occasions that they were operational, the residue was often dumped in the desert around the plants and eventually found its way back into the atmosphere," said Zaki. Exactly how the residue will be disposed of now has not yet been determined. But one thing remains certain: unless it is disposed of in an environmentally safe manner, reducing emissions will be of little benefit to anyone.

Although contracting a company to help reduce pollution is a positive move, some wonder just how well it will work in a situation of conflicting interests: Sabry Aglan, advisor on environmental affairs to Atiq Abd el-Aziz, minister of environment, and Salah Hafez, head of EEAA, are both on ASENPRO's board of directors, and El-Zarka is a consultant to the firm. "I am curious to understand who will supervise and monitor the company's operations and how they will do so," said one concerned official.

Helwan residents have in previous years suffered from many forms of industrial pollution. For example, liquid wastes pollute the river Nile with 750kg of heavy metals per day in the Helwan district. The area is home to iron and steel industries, lead and zinc smelting and chemical industries among other things, according to a report submitted to the United States Agency for International Development.

But the damaging effects of cement on health, soil and vegetation are most evident and much easier to rectify. If pollution from cement production is contained and PM reduced to natural background levels, then around 3,000-16,000 deaths and 90-270 million pollution-induced restricted activity days would be avoided each year, the report said.

But health means more than just the absence of disease: "Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity," according to the World Health Organisation definition. Even with the greatest optimism, if the factories of Helwan comply with the new standards set by Law 4, it will be quite a while before the air in Helwan will be clean, and quite a long while still before Helwan will be a "healthy" place in which to live.

Headed for unleaded

People in Cairo's residential areas have 30 micrograms per deciliter ($\mu\text{g}/\text{dl}$) of lead in their blood, about three times the World Health Organisation (WHO) recognised maximum safe level. High levels of lead in the blood cause lead poisoning with symptoms ranging from excessive tiredness, confused headaches, loss of appetite and muscular pain. A study conducted by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) found lead poisoning can cause a significant decrease in children's IQ (about 4.25 IQ points per child).

As a result, the Egyptian government passed Law 4 of 1994 which prioritised efforts to combat lead pollution. The incentives for doing so definitely exist: reducing the lead in Cairenes' blood would lower both the infant mortality rate by 820 deaths per year as well as the number of deaths from cardiovascular diseases.

In Egypt there are over two million vehicles, almost all of which use leaded gasoline, making petrol a predominant source of lead pollution. Official statistics show that 20 per cent of cars use 90 octane gasoline, containing 0.9 grams per liter (g/l) of lead, while the remaining 80 per cent use 80 octane gasoline, containing 0.4g/l of lead, according to the USAID study.

In accordance with these findings and the requirements set by Law 4, the Ministry of Petroleum embarked on an Environmental Action Plan (EAP) which includes plans to reduce the lead level to the international standard of 0.5g/l, build and supply petrol stations with

unleaded gasoline, and apply natural gas to car

pay more, El-Banbi claims that chances for widening the use of unleaded petrol remain slim because production "requires special refineries that are very costly."

Conditions do, however, seem ripe for a switch to compressed natural gas (CNG) as a cleaner and cheaper substitute for leaded gasoline and diesel. CNG, suitable for all cars and vehicles, produces significantly lower levels of harmful pollutants. Carbon dioxide emissions are reduced as much as 90 per cent and hydrocarbons by 85 per cent when vehicles use CNG, the USAID study shows.

Egypt is the first country in the Middle East to use CNG. Cheaper to use than gasoline, CNG costs LE0.45 per gasoline-equivalent litre, and is much healthier for both the environment and motor maintenance, El-Banbi says. More important, a recent CNG study estimated that converting the Cairo Transport Authority (CTA) bus fleet to natural gas could eliminate between one and 10 latent cancer fatalities out of every 10,000 permanent inhabitants of Cairo every year.

Since the project was launched in 1992, 50 CTA buses have been converted and a plan is currently under way to convert another 300 vehicles to CNG, as part of a project with USAID. There is one gas station for vehicles using CNG on Al-Abbasiya road and another in Nasr City. Three other filling stations are being built in the Dokki, Agouza and Almaza districts.

To widen the use of unleaded petrol, El-Banbi claims that chances for widening the use of unleaded petrol remain slim because production "requires special refineries that are very costly."

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Edited by Fouad El-Gawhary

The Nile Delta, to the right, is shown upside down with the traditional seven branches as represented in Greek geography. The names in the spaces between the tributaries represent 14 important cities. On the left, the vividly coloured stones depict the Jordan River flowing into the Dead Sea, and to its south, the houses of Jerusalem enclosed in an oval.



Egypt shifts on the Madaba Map

A discerning eye can locate Egypt and the branches of the Nile on the ancient Madaba Map, but the mosaic was created as a work of art and not as a cartographer's product; the Nile Delta and valley appear upside down and to the east of Palestine. Not only do these glitches give the map its primitive charm, they divulge its biblical bearing.

Father Piccirillo, of the Franciscan Archaeological Institute in Jerusalem provided a religious explanation for the positioning of Egypt on this famous map, discovered when a sixth century church in the village of Madaba, south of Amman, was excavated in December 1896. "Biblical geography indicated the Nile as being one of the four rivers of paradise which is set to the east," he said. "Therefore, the artist took liberties with physical geography to conform with

The Madaba Map is one of the earliest portrayals of the eastern Mediterranean, discovered in 1896. Its centenary is being celebrated in Jordan. Sherine Nasr scrutinises the mosaic's telling details

theology." He added that the mosaist might have portrayed the Nile instead of the other three rivers of paradise because the Nile was seen as the source of life and prosperity.

The Nile Valley, the coast of Lebanon, the Jordan Valley, the mountains of the Galilee and the holy city of Jerusalem are some of the places portrayed on this masterpiece of Jordanian mosaic art. The map aroused great interest when it was discovered, not only for its artistic merit but for its historical significance.

It occupies the eastern floor of the Church of Madaba, between the first and third rows of pillars, in front of the presbytery, which extends from the northern to the southern walls. The map is

visible as one enters the church and walks towards the altar, where visitors can see the map from the point of view of the Greek calligraphy. Measuring 15.70m by 5.60m, it covers 150 locales stretching from Lebanon to Egypt, and from the Mediterranean to the steppe of Jordan, as one vast and unified region.

Both the creator of the mosaic and the date of its execution are unknown. "Its dating can only be resolved by examining the map itself," said Father Piccirillo. "Identifiable localities on the map make it most likely that it was created in the second half of the sixth century." He pointed out that similar churches were built at that time including those at

area known as the Fountain of Jericho — the Church of Gulgala and the sanctuary of the Egyptian martyrs Arcs, Promos and Elijah — near Ashkelon on the Palestinian coast. These places were mentioned first by Italian pilgrims who visited the region in about 570 A.D. "There are also stylistic considerations within the mosaic school of the city of Madaba which indicate that the map was laid around that date," Father Piccirillo pointed out.

In spite of the limited scope of the map, a huge area is covered and cities, towns and roads can be identified. Pelusium (modern-day Balouza) in northern Sinai, Jerusalem and Gaza can be easily distinguished from smaller cities and towns — such as the

important towns of Jericho and Beih Zacharia. Even details like a gate flanked by two towers and a church are visible and depicted realistically. "The fish in the flowing Nile, the palm trees around the oasis of Jericho and the springs of the Jordan Valley make the map all the more vivid," said Father Piccirillo.

Historically important features of the map include the twelve stones inserted into the wall of the Church of Gulgala, and the configuration of Kerak as a fortified city set on a mountain in an isolated position.

The mosaic reaches its figurative high point in Jerusalem which forms the very heart of the map. "Its central location and the detailed definition of its planning

is an immediate reminder of the importance the city had reached by the sixth century," said Father Piccirillo.

The main walls, gates, streets, basilicas and buildings of Jerusalem are all meticulously portrayed. The main street, flanked by a colonnade and portico, is still identifiable as Bab Al-Amoud, or the Gate of the Column. Other buildings with slanted roofs are placed in relation to the main road network of the city. There are enough clues with which to identify the two basilicas near the end of the main street — the Basilica of Holy Zion to the west and the Nea Theotokos to the east.

Scientists from Egypt, Jordan and Palestine gather every year to celebrate the discovery of this early work of art which depicts a unified biblical and historical region.

New sites, projects and deals

FOUR million pounds have been allocated to light the way to 12 historical sites. They include the temples of Ramses II at Abu Simbel, the northern walls and towers of the Saladin Citadel, Sultan Hassan's mosque and school, the Mosque of Ibn Tulun, and, in Alexandria, Kom El-Dikka and Pompei's Pillar.

ANTIQUITIES prepared for exhibition abroad are being spared the slight damage incurred by radio-carbon dating, thanks to the introduction of ultra-violet rays. Invisible radiation is now used to determine the date, status and material of antiquities slated for travel.

PILGRIMS en route to Saudi Arabia via Egypt have the option to fit into their itinerary a one or two-day visit to Egypt's historical sites or a quick tour of Cairo's most famous landmarks. EgyptAir and several foreign travel agencies have planned an appropriately speedy programme.

THE CHAMBERS of tourism of Egypt and Syria have agreed to offer reduced hotel prices and air fares to tourists in an attempt to increase travel between the two countries.

A JOINT committee of the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA) has earmarked the Sakkara Palace in Cairo's Al-Daher district for conversion into a medical museum to provide a record of Egypt's medical legacy from the dawn of history to the present. Fahmi Abdel-Alim, head of the Islamic and Coptic Sector of the SCA, emphasized that the plan is still in the "preparatory stages" as the palace must first be restored.

IN MAY, the SCA and the Cairo governorate will launch a project to overhaul and restore the monuments of Al-Muezz Liddin Allah Street in Cairo. They will begin construction at Bab Al-Futuh to Al-Azhar Street, and then make their way to Bab Zuweila. New regulations have been devised to ban area activities that might generate vibrations and harm the monuments.

SINAI will soon inaugurate its first scientific institute at East Qantara, on the Sinai side of the Suez Canal. The Educational Centre for Monuments, as it will be called, will train archaeologists in the latest digging and excavation techniques. Teaching staff will consist of qualified archaeologists and engineers who will also study Sinai's ancient monuments and the relics returned from Israel.

DUBAI of the United Arab Emirates, will hold the first shopping festival of the area between 15 February and 28 March. One and a half million visitors are expected and they can make purchases from different outlets including handicrafts, jewelry, clothing and antiques. Artists from all over the world will take part.

CAIRO UNIVERSITY students are organising a two-day conference on 15-16 February in which 80 delegates will speak on a variety of topics related to tourism, including the role of youth in its development and promotion.

Complementary lines

Neither pomp nor pretension

Once again Helen Miles and Jaroslaw Dobrowolski match lines to describe a refurbished 14th century monument

The *Madrasa* (school) of Inal Al-Yusufi sketched here has no airs and graces. It is a simple no-nonsense sort of building with none of the monumental pretensions of its architectural contemporaries. Its proportions are human rather than celestial — its walls are plain, its flat ceiling is unadorned, its wooden details are not carved or inlaid with fantastic designs.

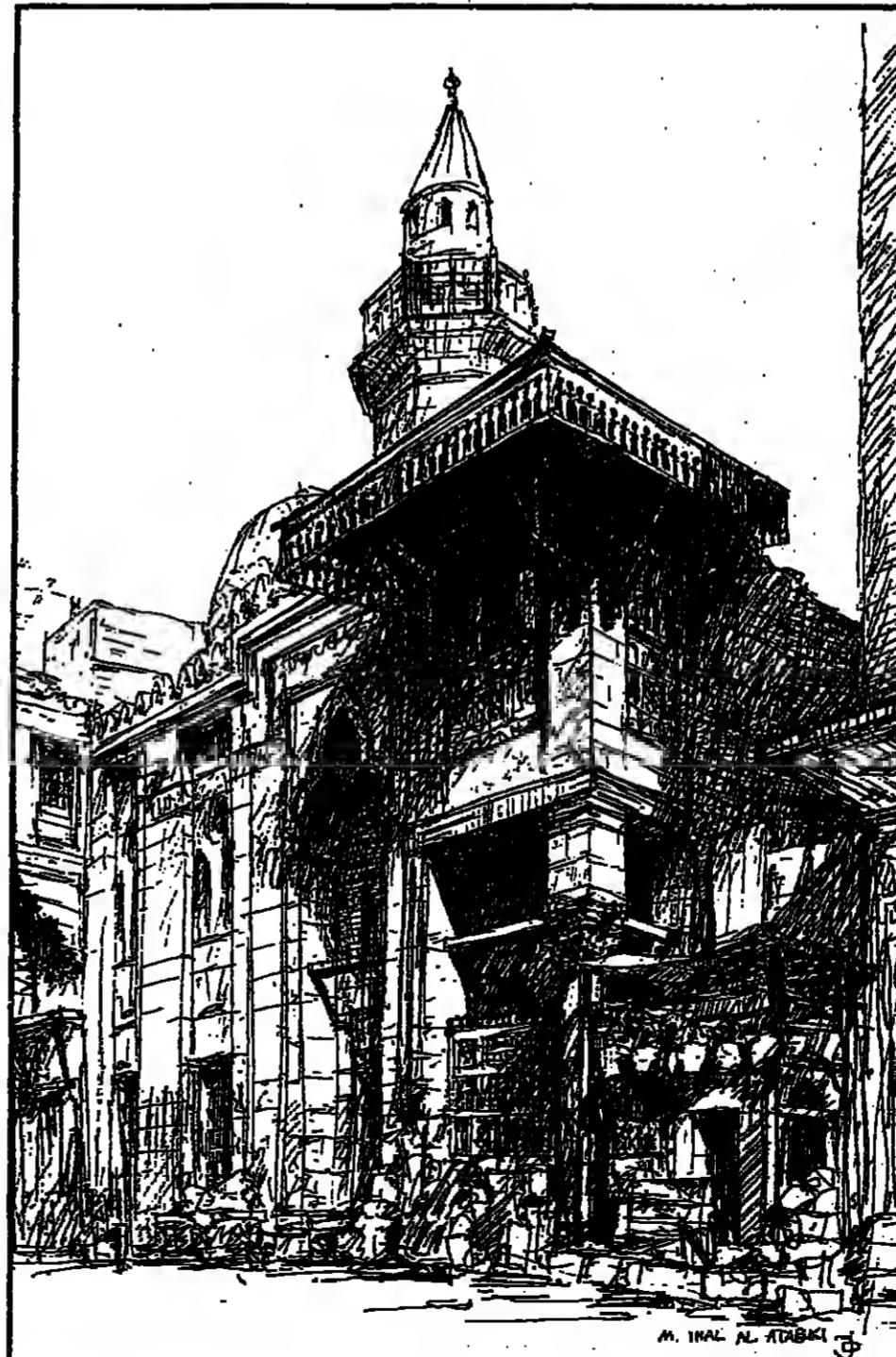
Yet the work of the early decorators has not been entirely erased. The stained glass windows — embellished with flowers and script and the blazon of their benefactor — are exquisite, and sufficient unto themselves, like a jewel on the neck of an old woman. The moulding in the tomb chamber off the main hall has all the hallmarks of medieval craftsmanship and there is a beauty in the simple scale of the building which substitutes for the lack of pomp.

Moreover, the school, built in the days of the Mamlukes, does not seem to resent finding itself washed up on the shores of the late 20th century. Its modern fixtures and fittings, such as the three suburban chandeliers and wall-to-wall carpeting, do not look out of place. And its tomb, encased in green and embroidered with the name of Inal Al-Yusufi, looks as well-kept as it ever was.

The man responsible for the construction of the building was an *emir* (prince) in the court of Sultan Sha'ban II, who also served as the viceroy of Syria. Al-Yusufi achieved notoriety and prestige for his courage, which is just as well since the times were bloody and Sha'ban himself ended up a dead man in the hands of his own Mamlukes during a pilgrimage to Mecca. Al-Yusufi's position was undented by his ruler's fate and he went on to become an army commander under Sultan Barquq in 1390.

The *madrasa* was founded in 1392-3 and was built to incorporate the functions of both a school and a mosque, although the side *louvres* (recessed areas around the central space used for instruction) are too narrow to be useable. There is also a *sabil-kuttab* attached — a complex which houses both a water dispensary on the ground floor and a rural-type school on the second. It is set in a corner to allow the breeze to cool the water and is protected by a wooden screen.

You can find the *madrasa* as you walk away from Bab Zuweila down the Tannakha Street. It is the second building on your left after the covered area.



EGYPT AIR	
Telephone numbers of EGYPT AIR offices in governorates:	
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Penalty problems

Amidst rioting Ahli fans, Zamalek clinched the third and final super-league tournament. But a national league champion cannot be decided until the junior tournament is played. Inas Mazhar reports

Two weeks ago, Olympic of Alexandria was dropped to the B division and their super-league results were nullified by the Egyptian Handball Federation. The move was a penalty for attacking the referees in the last 18 seconds of a second super-league match with Ahli in Tanta.

Then, last week, the scenario was repeated — different match, a different venue, and a different competition, but the similarities were unmistakable. The match was between the two traditional powerhouses of the game, arch-rivals Ahli and Zamalek. The venue was the Cairo Stadium indoor complex and the competition was the third and final super-league tournament.

Ahli's standing suffered as a result of Olympic's suspension. Ahli maintained their first place, but Zamalek took over the second position, gained some points and narrowed Ahli's lead to one point.

With only three teams now playing in the super-league — Ahli, Zamalek and Sporting — each team had only two matches to play instead of three. Sporting of Alexandria surprised Ahli and the fans with a 24-22 victory, putting Ahli under maximum pressure in its match with Zamalek the following day, the match which would go a long way to determine who would be league champions. If Ahli won, they would be more or less certain to take the league championship. A winner will not be declared until the junior tournament is played between the same three teams. Points won by the juniors will be added to the seniors' points and the winner decided on the combined results. Ahli's juniors are ahead of Zamalek, so an Ahli victory in this match would clinch the championship.

The game began smoothly, with Ahli leading 14-12. But Zamalek fought back in the second half to draw 17-17. Tension rose and the fight got tougher as Zamalek inchled their way into the lead with two goals. Then with two minutes to go before the final whistle, the situation blew up.

A train crash had prevented the designated match referees from arriving at the stadium on time, and their places had been taken by substitutes. Twelve seconds before the end of the match Ahli were denied a penalty that was rightly theirs, a penalty that would have given Ahli a draw and the league championship title.

The match stopped for half an hour as arguments took place between the team, referees and officials. The referees refused to budge. This was too much for Ahli's fanatical supporters, who started rioting, pulling out seats and throwing them onto the pitch. Ahli refused to continue play under these conditions and, with the score standing at 23-22 to Zamalek, the referees had to suspend the match. The Egyptian Handball Federation is to meet to decide whether to consider the match null and void, in which case it will be taken that Ahli withdrew and Zamalek will take the match, or whether the score will stand — also giving a Zamalek victory. Either way Ahli are the losers. The meeting will also mete out penalties to the Ahli side.

Zamalek's victory over Sporting the following day gave them the third super-league title and brought them close to clinching the league trophy for the second consecutive year. With Ahli's advantage in the juniors, they are theoretically still in with a chance. But there is always the possibility of surprise results, and, in addition, Ahli is waiting to see what penalties will be taken against it by the handball federation. They are expected to be harsh. Ahli might also face the same penalty imposed on Olympic — relegation to the B division.



Zamalek's Hossam Ghareeb on his way to penetrating Ahli's defence

photo: Ashraf Fares

Victim or trouble-maker?

The fame that clued footballer El-Sayed Hassan on the pitch finally caught up with him. The 27-year-old Hassan took his old club, Al-Masri, to the international football federation for not paying dues stipulated in his contract — the first time in Egyptian football history that FIFA has been brought into a player-club dispute.

Hassan, who moved from Al-Masri Club of Port Said to Olympic of Alexandria last October, insisted that he be paid the full amount of the one-off payment stipulated in his contract: LE45,000. But Al-Masri offered only LE15,000 in addition to two months' salary. The Egyptian Football Federation (EFF) supported the club's decision. Hassan, however, was not satisfied and decided to take the matter to FIFA, which seconded his team's decision.

However, the club still did not pay the LE16,200 owed, and the EFF failed to take decisive measures.

Efforts to exact the money. FIFA intervened again at the player's request, and fixed 28 January 1996 as a deadline for the payment.

By 28 January, Hassan still had not seen the colour of Al-Masri's money. FIFA decided to pay him himself and deduct the sum from the EFF's account. It also threatened Al-Masri with relegation to the second division.

Officials at Al-Masri were furious. Not only had Hassan put the club in a bad light, but the whole country as well, accused El-Sayed Metwally, the club's director, who said that his action showed the player's bad intentions towards his club and Egypt in general.

There had been no need to involve FIFA because, he maintained, "It is well-known that rights are never disregarded in Egypt. Even if the player had to go to court he would certainly have got his dues in the end."

Metwally recalled that problems with Hassan began soon after the club bought the player, when his poor performance kept him on the bench. The club, he said, had been eager to get rid of him. "What is the logic of keeping a player who is well paid but of no use?" Metwally asked. According to EFF rules, Hassan had the right to move to another team, which he decided to do a few months ago. But, explained Metwally, his early departure meant that he lost his right to the full amount of money specified in his contract.

"It seems that the player was seeking fame and fortune," he alleged. "He is a trouble-maker, who used his aggressive methods to blackmail the club, first by bringing in the EFF and then upping the stakes by involving FIFA."

He added that his club is studying new European-style contracts, in which players are not promised single lump sums, but instead receive a

series of payments during their stay at a club. Hassan's supporters criticise the EFF for failing to solve the problem before it reached international level. "The player begged the EFF to mediate to solve the problem," said Essam Abdel-Moneim, president of the Egyptian Sports Press Association. Even when FIFA had contacted the EFF and specified dates to pay the player, "the federation ignored the issue again, leaving FIFA to sort it out". EFF officials, Abdel-Moneim claimed, were too busy giving speeches and showing off to the media to pay attention to the dispute.

The EFF, of course, tells a different story. According to Youssef El-Dahsbouri Harb, head of the EFF, the federation had already solved the problem before FIFA's intervention. "The club offered a cheque which was due to be paid in February, so we decided that we would pay the player and keep the cheque in return," he said. But nevertheless the

player had gone ahead and complained to FIFA. "Of course, I accept FIFA as the father of football federations, and I respect its intervention," Harb added.

According to Harb, Hassan is considered a trouble-maker by both his former clubs, Arab Contractors and Al-Masri, as well as his current club, Olympic. "The EFF received many complaints from Olympic about this player's bad manners and behaviour," he said. He added that both Olympic and the EFF intended to punish him "to make an example of him for misusing football to gain publicity".

Harb also launched a strong attack on critics who had circulated "false stories" about the incident, accusing the Egyptian federation of negligence. "These people are willing to make claims aimed at destroying Egypt's image for the sake of their own personal interests," he said.

Volleyball barred

The National Olympic Committee's decision preventing Egypt's volleyballers from joining the Olympic team in Atlanta was viewed as harsh and potentially damaging. Abeer Anwar reviews the repercussions

It was poor performances by both the men's and women's volleyball teams in the World Cup last November which prompted the NOC's controversial decision to exclude the Egyptian volleyball team from the Olympics. The NOC has been charged with the task of reducing the number of athletes travelling to Atlanta. Only teams with a chance of winning, or at least achieving a respectable placing, will be allowed to travel — in the committee's view, the volleyballers do not come into this category.

In response, the volleyball federation's board, headed by Major Raouf El-Mannawi, presented its collective resignation. With no prospects of convincing the NOC to go back on its decision, the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports was forced to appoint a new board.

The fury that greeted the decision within the federation was prompted more by fear of international reaction to the decision than by the decision itself — it came too late to withdraw officially, and Egypt's position was made worse because it was playing host to the African women's qualifiers for Atlanta. Another total suspension for Egyptian volleyball was widely predicted because of the late withdrawal, something which would have been disastrous for the game. "We still have not recovered from our previous two-year suspension," explained El-Mannawi. "We were lagging behind after the suspension was lifted, but we tried hard to regain our position as top African country last year."

Meanwhile, the new EVF was faced with the decision of whether to participate in the qualifications. It decided that the team would play. But that raised another question: what if Egypt won the qualifications and the NOC refused to reverse its decision? This would put Egyptian volleyball in a very difficult position.

So will the federation ask players to lose the qualifiers? "Of course it is unethical to ask players to lose," responded Amr Elwan, head of the federation's new board. Elwan spent days in constant communication with International Vol-

leyball Federation (IVF) President Robin Acosta, even travelling to France to meet him personally, in an attempt to reach a solution to escape a full suspension.

The IVF's sentence, when it came, was relatively lenient: Egypt is officially barred from playing in Atlanta '96, a punishment described by Elwan as "the least Egypt could expect".

Some see the IVF's decision as the only way out for Egypt — after all, it merely mirrored what the NOC had decided in the first place. Others are highly critical of both the NOC and the IVF, and see the team's non-participation as a nail in its coffin. By Sydney 2000, they argue, the current team will be too old to succeed, and all its achievements to date will have been fruitless.

"Just like that, it's all over for this national team," said Fouad Abdelsalam, the national team coach. "This team, with the players' bright and experience, is the best we've had in a long time. We will just have to work very hard with the juniors. They could be the nucleus of a very strong national team."

Widespread rumours that the suspension would also cover Sydney 2000 were quashed by Elwan. "This suspension applies only to Atlanta '96. There was no mention of Sydney 2000 in the suspension fix," he said.

However, the international federation has changed the venue of the African Women's qualifications — they will now be held in Nigeria instead of Egypt.

Meanwhile, according to Ali El-Rafea, secretary of the EVF, the men's and women's national teams are continuing their training at the Olympic Centre in preparation for Dubai's international championship, to be held in April. Next on the agenda is the Arab Games in Beirut in September. El-Rafea insists that the team will not be affected by the decision: "Our schedule of local and international competitions remains unchanged, whether or not we are going to Atlanta."

Ramadan five-a-side

FOR THE second consecutive year, the Cairo Soccer Zone organised a five-a-side Ramadan soccer tournament at the Ahli indoor hall, reports Inas Mazhar. Under the supervision of Hazem El-Hawari, president of the Cairo zone, matches were held daily after *iftar*, running on until *suhour*. More than 30 men's teams took part, some of them including former soccer stars among their numbers — such as Gamal Abdel-Hamid, Magdi Abdel-Ghani, Tarek Yehia, Zakaria Nassef, Mohamed Ramadan, Rabie Yassin, Ayman Younes and Alaa Mabrouk. Other famous names from outside the world of sport brought star quality to this sporting festival. Participants also included President Mubarak's

sons Alaa and Gamal Mubarak, with their team, Shorouq. The team performed well until its progress was stopped by injury in the semifinal. But the Mubaraks displayed a sporting attitude by appearing the following day to attend the final, distribute the cups and medals, and pose for pictures with the teams and even some of the fans.

Although there was an unofficial women's Ramadan competition last year, this was the first women's competition following the appointment of Sahar El-Hawari to an official post responsible for women's soccer in Egypt. The eight women's teams played as a league, and their games were just as

ed and competitive as the men's.

Sahar El-Hawari declared that she was happy with the women's standard, which has improved a lot during the past year. "The women can now compete anywhere," she said. "They are capable of playing against strong foreign teams and even challenged a men's team in one of the Ramadan matches and were just as good." A women's soccer committee has been formed, and, according to El-Hawari, women's participation in the Cairo Zone soccer tournament is just the beginning of an official programme for the women's game.

Edited by Inas Mazhar

Sayed El-Daoui: Healing for hearts

The million lines
brewing in his mind
are the final link in an
age-old story

When most men die, their stories die with them. That might explain the fear I felt driving Sayed El-Daoui across the Nile from a recent performance at the British Council to his hotel room on Clot Bey. I know it's morbid, but I couldn't help thinking: what if we crash?

Sayed El-Daoui has probably told more stories than any other man on the planet. The verses in his head outnumber all those written by Walt Whitman, Ahmed Shawqi and a dozen other poets from a dozen other nations combined. If Sayed El-Daoui were to tell every story he knows, one after the other, without stopping, it might take six months or more.

These are neither exaggerations nor random figures. The stories Sayed tells are all part of one gigantic story, an epic poem of a million lines or more. Al-Sira Al-Hilalya is the tale of a folk hero's endless exploits; the escapades of Abu Zeid Al-Hilali — a conqueror of conquerors, renowned in villages from Tunis to Iran, the very model of manliness and dignity and a Don Juan to boot — have been recounted at coffeehouses, weddings, circumcisions and moulds for centuries.

These days, Abu Zeid has an audience in urban cultural centres the world over. Sayed El-Daoui was in Paris recently, recounting the *sira* to a packed house in the amphitheatre at the Cite de la Musique. During the trip he was profiled in *Liberation*; the author compared him to a Greek relative of Homer's who could still recite the *Iliad* or *Odyssey* by heart.

It's safe to say, though, that Sayed El-Daoui is the last of the world's legendary story-tellers. Aged 62, he has been telling the *sira* for nearly 40 years.

Sayed has a pinched, bony look. He is dark, and wears golden-framed eyeglasses. They immediately distinguish him from his colleagues, although all the members of his entourage dress the same. Turbans on their heads, woolen shawls wrapped around their necks: each wears an earth-toned *galabiya*, holds a *rababa* in hand and has a mouthful silver teeth.

Sayed may be the final link in a tradition that once linked the world. But who wants to just listen to a story anymore? Even in the villages Sayed has mostly been replaced by TVs, VCRs and Amis. Last week, he was on what is rapidly becoming more familiar ground, performing with Hassan El-Girifi's Al-Warsa troupe at the British Council in Agouza, then in a Ministry of Culture-sponsored Ramadan nights programme at the National Theatre in Ababda.

On stage at the National, Sayed didn't get into it as much as the others. He looked lost, like he was in another world. In Al-Warsa's chic yet cozy version of a village tent, Sayed was in a different kind of mood. Very alert, correcting his colleagues when they mixed up a name, laughing whenever the story called for it.

Then, when it was his turn, Sayed slipped into the *sira* like it was a second skin. He spoke the verse: not mere memorised lines that could have been about someone else, but as if it was his own story, as if he, or one of his ancestors, had watched and participated in every twist and turn. Singing, speaking, chanting, slowing down, speeding up, raising his voice, speaking to the audience in a conspiratorial whisper, as though letting us in on some secret meaning, then the sudden, emphasised sentence or phrase.

"Healing for hearts!" he might explode, repeating the phrase several times, his voice undulating in tandem with the *rababa* he is softly strumming.

EVERY STORY MUST start with a blessing for the Prophet, peace be upon him. It is Sayed's favourite part of the job, and a clear remedy for any ailment. "If I don't start with a 15-minute blessing I cannot tell the story. The blessing is the key to the usefulness of it all," he says.

Has the *sira* made him wise? We are sitting in the sun-drenched room he shares with Hamam Abbas Mohamed, the *rababa* maestro who has accompanied Sayed for decades, at the hotel on Clot Bey. For the past two nights I and dozens of other eager *sira*-seekers have braved the *khamasita* dust storms to hear Sayed tell "The orphans' tale" under the tent in Agouza.

A wry smile spreads over Sayed's face. He seems comfortable, even more so here in the hotel than when he was telling the *sira* under the tent, that is possible. "It's given me the ability to think and talk," he says. "I can teach people about manliness and generosity. I can correct people when they're on the wrong track."

But doesn't he ever get jealous of Abu Zeid, or wish he himself could have adventures like his?

Sayed becomes very serious. "No, there is no jealousy involved. I am most happy when I'm telling these tales of courage... I feel I am one of them."



THE ULTIMATE STORY-TELLER: For forty years Sayed El-Daoui has captivated audiences in Upper Egypt, and more recently, as far as Paris, with the amazing adventures of Abu Zeid Al-Hilali. But will those million lines, akin to the *Odyssey* or the *Iliad* before they were written down, survive?

POET ABDEL-RAHMAN El-Abnoudi has spent decades trying to collect the *sira* and write it down in a series of published volumes. With the help of El-Daoui, his efforts have led to the current market availability of nearly one-fifth of the poem. Other parts of the *sira* are being recorded at this moment: the tapes will be on sale some time in the near future. "The orphans' tale" is one of those parts, and to give a rough estimate of how long the *sira* is, 26 tapes have been recorded already, but "The orphans' tale" is far from over.

There we sat, intoxicated by the musky smell of dirt, dust and vegetation, illuminated by five naked bulbs hanging from a wooden cross, and surrounded by pristine white tents, over three nights at Al-Warsa, listening to a story that went something like this:

Turn apart by the death of his son, Abu Zeid cries so much he becomes blind. Seizing the opportunity, his cousin takes over his throne and orders the entire tribe of Hiloli murdered. In the nick of time Abu Zeid sends eighty pregnant Hiloli women to another tribe in order to insure that the Hiloli name stays alive, but this other tribe cannot know that the women and their future babies are Hilolis. The plan works and the children grow into great warriors.

One day they return to Abu Zeid. Although he is blind and of course has never seen them before he knows them off by name, because he is a wise man. And as he is embracing one of the young men, their heads collide and Abu Zeid regains his sight.

Abu Zeid decides to make up with his cousin, who sensing that his deed will be punished, has run away

to a distant land. Abu Zeid wants to send his cousin a message of reconciliation, and is looking for a messenger who will brave the dangers that lie in wait on the way. Abu Zeid's son Mekheimer volunteers, and signs a contract permitting Abu Zeid to hang him if the mission does not succeed.

Mekheimer and 39 other men set off, fighting many courageous battles along the way. But one of the tribal lords, anxious to avenge a previous defeat at the hands of Abu Zeid, sets a sand-trap for Mekheimer. Although he fights valiantly, Mekheimer is captured and put in prison. His 39 men continue the battle until Mekheimer orders one of them to go tell his father the news. Thirty-eight men, after all, are just as strong as 39, especially if they are Hilolis.

Upon hearing the news Abu Zeid promptly appears with 100 warriors. In instant the tribal lord is sliced in two by the sword of Abu Zeid's loyal slave. Mekheimer is saved but, since he did not fulfil his contract, Abu Zeid insists on hanging his son.

SAYED EL-DAOUI'S only son, Hamdi, died eight years ago, aged 27, of liver complications. Sayed says that El-Abnoudi had arranged for the boy, who was beginning to learn the *sira* from his father (as Sayed had learned it from his father before him), to receive treatment in Moscow at the Ministry of Culture's expense. "But it wouldn't have mattered anyway," says Sayed. "It was his time to go."

Sayed's gaze never leaves some place very far off in the distance. He is nearly blind now, and during some performances he seems almost stoic, drumming in-

stead of strumming the *rababa*. But his presence is enough to lend the *sira* a certain authenticity.

"He's the best," says Zein, a member of Al-Warsa currently training with El-Daoui. "He's like a father to me. No one compares. These new younger singers like Antar or Jabaron, they only know one or two parts, they can't begin to think of the number of stories Sayed knows."

Ever since his son died, Sayed has made it his mission to try and teach as many youngsters as he can how to tell the *sira*. He has opened up a school in Qena, his village near Qena, where four pupils are currently enrolled. The star is his ten-year-old grandson, Ramadan. Ramadan, his two sisters and their mother, Sayed's daughter Nagat, have been living with their grandfather ever since Nagat's husband died.

CAN A MAN BE BOTH weak and strong at the same time? Sayed El-Daoui should know: he is a teller of tales about the manliest of men. And as he begins to answer, I notice the hotel walls are a luminous green, the colour of the prophet's manteau.

"A man who is not both weak and strong is not a man," he says, sounding a lot like he does when he recites the *sira*, mixing rhythm and rhyme, waving his arms for emphasis then clasping his fingers together. He wears a golden ring on his right hand, a silver ring on the left. "We have a saying in Upper Egypt... What bends doesn't break."

Then he repeats the first part of the phrase more slowly. "What bends," he says, making every word

curve out of his mouth before drifting into the air. "doesn't break."

A METAPHOR FOR THE SIRA itself, perhaps? I'm reminded of a story told by another folk hero/story-teller, one named Bob Marley. "This could be the first trumpet," sings the Jamaican bard in *Natural Mystic*, "might as well be the last. Many more will have to suffer, many more will have to die, don't ask me why... No one tries to find the answers to all the questions they ask, no one knows it's impossible, to go living through the past."

Sayed El-Daoui did not invent Abu Zeid's epic, and he certainly didn't ask to be the dying gasp of its most glorious era. Sayed's gift is his memory and the way he tells the tale. He still woos audiences every time he performs, consistently converting some first-timer into a *sira*-freak who has to hear another story every night to satisfy his new-found addiction. Or the same story several times, since Sayed always seems to have multiple versions in stock.

Sayed seems to accept that the *sira* will shrink significantly once he is gone. Not for lack of effort, of course; but it is unlikely that any of the heirs to this literary legacy — worth far more than any material inheritance — could handle the load of a million verses of rhyme.

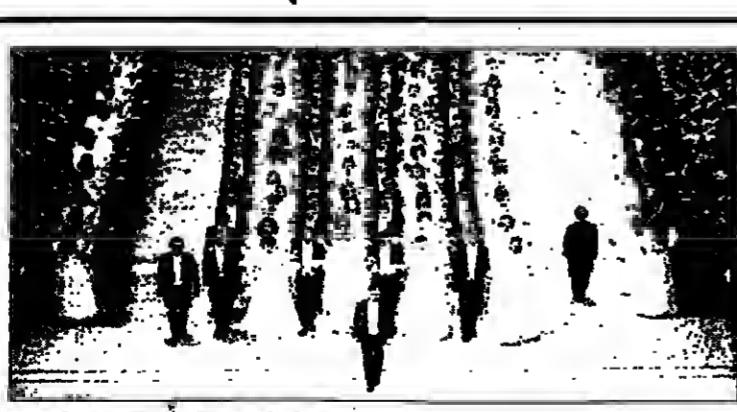
"It doesn't matter," Sayed says with a relaxed certainty. "As long as a few people are still telling it, the *sira* will never die."

Profile by Tarek Atia

Pack of Cards



by Madame Sosostris



And Cinderella shall go to the ball...

more, when the Nile Hilton holds a Vienna Opera Ball on the fifteenth of next month, with music provided by the Vienna Opera Ball Orchestra. No minor event this, the Nile Hilton started preparations over three weeks ago, almost at the same time that I started rummaging through my old trunks looking for my satins and lace ball gown — which, strangely, seems a lot smaller than I remember it to be. And for those cynical, suspicious souls, let it be known that this will, in fact, be the real thing, for the event will be sponsored by none other than the city of Vienna itself. My good friend Michael Hauepi, the mayor of Vienna, tells me that the Ball is being held as a gesture of friendship between the two cities, which as far as I'm concerned is just fine — gestures of friendship over the years are what have made me the woman I am today.

Now In Egypt

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♦ I can never pass through the study at the British embassy without giggling with delight as I fondly remember spending many an evening, as a child, with Lord Cromer and being given endless supplies of sweets. But as times change, dears, so must we with them, and it was a wiser and somewhat older me who last Thursday once again sat in the study and met with the Lord Mayor of London to Cairo and Sheriff of London, Peter Leaven, over a delicious meal at the residence of the British Ambassador, David Blatherwick, in Garden City. David and his lovely wife had done a pretty good job of making Alderman John Chalstrey MA, MD, FRCS and the Lady Mayoress feel at home and had invited a large number of Cairo's medical community to meet with him. London's 656th Lord Mayor but the first surgeon ever to be elected to the post. A wonderful idea, of course, but it did mean that I was to spend a large part of the evening listening to a rather intriguing conversation revolving around aortic and spasms with renowned surgeon, head of the Doctors Syndicate Hamdi Sayed MP, former prime minister

Dr Abdel-Aziz Hegazi, composer and medic Farak Ali Hassan, Dr Nabil El-Mehairy and his wife, and Dr and Mrs Zohier Fard. Not quite my idea of a fun night out, but thankfully the evening was saved by the presence of fellow lovers of art, political columnist Salama Ahmed Salama and his charming wife Jo-Hane, art collector Maged Farag, my editor-in-chief, Honny Gandy and his ever lively wife Moushira.

♦ There's a price to pay for living in the desert, dears, but the recent sandstorms didn't stop the in-

diano ambassador, Kaawal Sbat, from celebrating India's forty-sixth Republic day in style. Escorted by the Weekly's very own International and South pages editor, Gamal Nkrumah, I daintily wrapped a perfumed handkerchief around my nose and mouth before I stepped into the gardens of the ambassador's residence. And judging by the turnout, it seemed that the guests, including ministers, ambassadors and journalists galore, would have done nothing to miss getting together to celebrate the occasion. Even knowing that no alcohol was

being served didn't stop them — they all knew that minor inconvenience would be well compensated for, and the prevailing air of disappointment was soon dispersed as sumptuous dishes after dish of absolutely mouthwatering Indian delicacies was sampled and savoured.

♦ If it takes fifty members of the Boehringer-Orient Pharmaceutical Company getting together in Sharm Al-Sheikh to discuss new methods and medicines for curing the cough, then so be it. Someone should have told them, though, that it's all the rage: don't you know, and quite socially acceptable these days to hem and haw as indiscreetly as possible. Still, you can't blame them for their good intentions, or blame Nahla Fayez, public relations coordinator and

Tamer Abul Nagib, sales executive at the Mövenpick Hotel for doing a wonderful job of organising the whole event.

♦ What pleasant, vivid memories I still treasure of my first coming-out ball many years ago. Although looking back, it seems that it was more a bursting out than anything else. And now, it seems that I have been given a chance to relive some of the best days of my youth once